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Shakespeare & the Middle Ages

Edited by
Curtis Perry & John Watkins

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Curtis Perry and John Watkins

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TEXTS

The following standard abbreviations occur throughout the book without further explanation:

- MED *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1953–2001).
- OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), and updates.
- STC *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English books printed abroad: 1475–1640*, 3 vols, ed. A. W. Pollard and G. W. Redgrave, 2nd edn, rev. and enlarged by Katherine F. Pantzer (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91).

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Shakespeare refer to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

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NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Beckwith is the author of *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001); and numerous other essays on medieval and Renaissance dramatic and religious culture. She is Professor of English and Theater at Duke University, and is currently working on a book called *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*.

Patrick Cheney is Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on early modern literature, including *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004) and *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008). He is also the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Poetry*.

Elizabeth Fowler's work in medieval and Renaissance literature ranges mainly from Chaucer to Milton and concerns the ethics and politics of notions of the person, the nature of political and jurisprudential thought as it occurs in the arts, and the bodily and social effects of poetry. She is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Virginia and lives on the side of the Blue Ridge.

Rebecca Krug is Associate Professor of English at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (2002; rpt. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008). She is currently working on a book about Margery Kempe and medieval 'self help'.

William Kuskin is Associate Professor of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is the author of *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (2008) and the editor of *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing* (2006), both published by the University of Notre Dame Press. He is currently working on two projects, a monograph on the relationship between fifteenth- and sixteenth-century literature, *Recursive Origins*, and a special issue of *English Language Notes*, 'Graphia: Literary Criticism and the Graphic Novel'.

Karen Sawyer Marsalek is Associate Professor of English at St Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. She has published several essays on the resurrection motif in medieval and Renaissance drama and is co-editor of *'Bring Furth the Pagants': Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007). She is currently working on editions of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*.

Michael O'Connell is Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000) and of articles on Shakespeare and medieval drama. He is completing an edition and translation of three Florentine *sacre rappresentazioni* from the late fifteenth century.

Curtis Perry is Professor of English at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. In addition to numerous articles and book chapters on early modern English literature and culture, he is the author of *The Making of Jacobean Culture* (1997) and *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (2006), and the editor of *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (2001) and *Eros and Power in English Renaissance Drama: Five Plays by Marlowe, Davenant, Massinger, Ford, and Shakespeare* (2008).

Brian Walsh is Assistant Professor in the English Department at Yale University. He recently completed a book manuscript on the history plays of the Queen's Men and their influence on Shakespeare, and has published essays on Elizabethan drama in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *SEL*, *Theatre Journal*, and elsewhere.

Christopher Warley teaches Renaissance poetry and critical theory at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), and is currently completing a book entitled *Specters of Horatio: Reading Class in Renaissance Literature*.

John Watkins is Professor of English, Medieval Studies, and Italian Studies at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and the Virgilian Epic Tradition* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995) and *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). With Carole Levin, he is the author of *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009).

Introduction

Curtis Perry and John Watkins

Shakespeare played an incalculable role in shaping later impressions of the Middle Ages. Almost any book written on the Hundred Years War or the Wars of the Roses begins by explaining just how Shakespeare got it wrong. He conflated characters, condensed chronologies, cleaned up some careers, and sullied others. He turned Joan of Arc into a sexually voracious sorceress and suppressed Humphrey of Gloucester's ambitions by characterizing him as a wise, disinterested councilor. His views of the conflict between York and Lancaster could not have been more biased. Even though we no longer see them as a reflection of Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture, we know that they derived more from sixteenth-century concerns about rebellion against the highly organized Tudor state than from anything like a modern scholar's understanding of the parcellized sovereignty of late medieval England. If you want to know something about what actually happened during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Shakespeare is not the best place to start.

But if every medieval biographer and historian knows that Shakespeare got it wrong, they still talk about him as if his fictions not only prompted their investigations but somehow continue to authorize them in the minds of the reading public. Paul Murray Kendall concluded his biography of Richard III with two appendices arguing (1) that Richard did not necessarily murder the young princes and (2) that Shakespeare endowed the Tudor slanders against Richard with such vitality that they have endured for centuries. The final sentence of his book apostrophizes this uncanny power: 'What a tribute this is to

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art; what a misfortune this is for history.¹ To the extent that Kendall frames his project as an answer to Shakespeare, he ends in disciplinary despair, as if he knew all along that Shakespeare's art would prove stronger than even the most diligent historian's research. Writing two generations later, Helen E. Maurer couched her biography of Margaret of Anjou as a similar defense against Shakespearean slanders. But as Maurer admits in her preface, her own 'introduction to Margaret of Anjou came on a warm summer evening in New York City when Shakespeare's Margaret strode across a stage in Central Park in a long, swishing skirt as if she owned the place.² Like Kendall, she sets out to correct the Shakespearean record in full knowledge that others have failed to do so before her: 'Though no one nowadays reads Shakespeare for history, his portrayal of Margaret, in the rough dimensions of her character, has proven to be remarkably resilient. . . . although historians have long since rejected Shakespearean excess, [his] is the view of Margaret that generally prevails.³

The extent to which Kendall, Maurer, and numerous other historians bemoan the persistence of Shakespearean interpretations of the Middle Ages suggests that people do read Shakespeare for history, or at least that Shakespeare colors historical understanding. For academic historians, this is a source of frustration, authorization, and even empowerment. Shakespeare may have gotten medieval history wrong, but he also made it matter to thousands of English readers for whom figures like Richard III, Richard II, Henry IV, and even Henry V would have been virtually indistinguishable if Shakespeare had never written. Henry III, who reigned for fifty-six years, arguably mattered more to England than Richard II, who ruled only for twenty-two. But there are more published biographies of Richard II because Shakespeare turned his reign into a defining moment in the English national experience.

While historians have concentrated on refuting Shakespeare's distortions of the Middle Ages, they have neglected the larger question of Shakespeare's role in defining their field in the first place. Shakespeare stands in some profound sense prior to our modern experience of the Middle Ages, despite our attempts at historiographical rigor. This priority explains the persistence of Shakespearean interpretations despite historians' efforts to put them to rest.

¹ Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard the Third* (1955; rpt. New York: Norton, 1983), 514.

² Helen E. Maurer, *Margaret of Anjou: Queenship and Power in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2003), vii.

³ *Ibid.* p. vii.

Even if we know that Shakespeare gave the wrong answers, he asked the right questions, or at least asked the questions that still shape our sense of what mattered during the Middle Ages.

Shakespeare's invention of the Middle Ages is one primary theme of the essays collected in this book. But it is a theme that we approach with considerable ambivalence. For it has become too common within English literary studies to see Shakespeare as the inventor of nearly everything, from erotic love to modern constitutional theory to modern subjectivity or humanity itself. Closely related to the Shakespeare who invents the Middle Ages is the Shakespeare who invents himself and who, in doing so, invents early modernity as well. Seen this way, Shakespeare becomes a primary exemplar of the Renaissance hailed by Burckhardt and his followers as a point of radical disjunction with the past and as a moment of heightened creative exuberance, when everything from the state to the individual psyche revealed itself as a work of conscious artistry. Who could possibly be a more perfect Burckhardtian hero than a glover's son from Stratford who not only fashions himself but single-handedly creates a thousand years of English history?

In order better to resist the lure of a neo-Burckhardtian idea of early modernity, we have counterpoised against the Shakespearean invention of the Middle Ages the seemingly antithetical question of the medieval invention of Shakespeare. To what extent do his poems and plays bear the impress not only of Hall and Holinshed—the Tudor chronicles that mediated his knowledge of pre-Elizabethan events—but of written and oral sources and cultural practices that now strike us as quintessentially medieval? As writers like Bernard Spivack and Anne Righter have argued, Shakespeare's plays sometimes advertise their departures from medieval theatrical practices.⁴ The ludicrousness of the rustic mechanicals' Pyramus and Thisbe play, for example, sets up a self-flattering contrast between Shakespeare and the weavers, joiners, bakers, brewers, and other guildsmen who staged the mysteries. But at the same time Edmund, Richard III, Iago, and even Falstaff ground their self-conscious villainy in the medieval Vice:

A king's son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild-geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more.

(1 Henry IV, 2.4.136–9)

⁴ Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958); Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962).

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Pat! He comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o'Bedlam.

(*King Lear*, 1.2.134–6)

The debt to the old drama runs even deeper. Shakespeare found in it not only a model for individual characters but also a structural inspiration for some of his greatest scenes. Emrys Jones once identified Jesus's apprehension by torchlight in the Garden of Gethsemane—a set-piece in almost every mystery cycle—as the basis for the Venetian posse that hunts down Othello at the Sagittary Inn.⁵ On an even larger scale of influence, Iago's and Desdemona's competition for Othello's soul exposes the whole play as a tragic *Mankind* or *Everyman* in which the Vice triumphs.

Earlier critics tended to follow Shakespeare's lead in seeing the movement from the Vice to Iago, or from *Everyman* to *Othello*, in triumphalist terms as a hallmark of Shakespeare's greater genius. But over a generation of work in political, social, economic, religious, literary, and theatrical history has by now so undermined the traditional story of a secular Renaissance enlightening the gloom and superstition of the Middle Ages that the question of Shakespeare's debt to the Middle Ages needs to be rethought completely. In some cases, we must consider new factual evidence suggesting that the boundaries between medieval and modern experience were less sharp than Shakespeareans once supposed. New work in theater history, for example, challenges long-standing assumptions about the inherent medievalness of the mysteries and moralities. We know that the Reformation did not lead to an abrupt mysteries' end in the early 1530s, and we also know that Protestantism was not inherently opposed to theatrical representation. The cycle plays were not fully suppressed until the 1560s and 1570s, late enough for the young Shakespeare to have seen ones performed at Coventry. For playgoers of Shakespeare's generation, and certainly for those a few years older, there was nothing medieval or culturally remote about such plays. They were contemporary theater. The moralities lasted even longer, since they were adapted to Protestant teachings as early as the 1530s.

More fundamentally, perhaps, we need to reconsider the interpretive oppositions that underlie the triumphalist vision of Shakespeare as the harbinger of modernity. That caricature establishes an antithesis between the Middle

⁵ Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 74–9.

Ages and the early modern period on the basis of oppositions between sacred and secular, Protestant and Catholic, feudal and capitalist, communal and individualist, Latin and vernacular, manuscript and print. Historians have repudiated some of these category markers as inaccurate, or at least analytically unstable. In other cases, they have left the opposition intact but asked us to reconsider the assumption that the modern alternative to medieval experience is necessarily better. Even if something we now call 'feudalism' once characterized economic and social life—itsself now a controversial claim—was it inherently less sophisticated, or less conducive to complex works of theatrical art, than capitalism? Must the individualism that so many critics have hailed as a defining aspect of the transition from *Mankind* to Marlowe be embraced as an improvement over the communitarianism that historians like Eamon Duffy have associated with the Middle Ages? If Duffy, on the other hand, exaggerates both the extent and the benevolence of that communitarianism—as several medievalists have charged—we also must contend with the possibility of something suspiciously analogous to market capitalism as early as the mid-fourteenth century.⁶ What if instead of expressing the values of a coherent Christian society, the mysteries staged a conflict between competing sectors of medieval society, between clergy and lay corporations, over the right to disseminate scripture? What if the centrality of attacks on 'covetyse' in plays like *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Mankind* arise not from an ancient Christian consensus against *avaritia* but from a topical resistance to new market practices that were creating a new class of prosperous burghers? In that case, we can hardly claim that the greater individualization that distinguishes Lear from Everyman or Iago from the Vice is a superstructural response to a basic intensification of economic competitiveness. Nor can we adopt a neo-Whig narrative attributing it to emergent middle-class creativity.

In short, the question of Shakespeare's relationship to the Middle Ages—whether as creator or creation—intersects with the even broader question of the emergence of modernity. Shakespeare, that source of inexhaustible cultural capital, has become a frequent stand-in for the modernity of the early modern. Thinking about Shakespeare and the Middle Ages, therefore,

⁶ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992). See also David Aers's critique, 'Altars of Power: Reflections on Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580*', *Literature and History* 3 (1994), 90–105.

means thinking about the narratives of transition with which we encapsulate Shakespeare and authorize our own discursive and institutional practices. We are concerned here both with the ways in which a Renaissance or early modern present was made out of the reconstructed knowledge of the medieval past and with the ways that these very historical categories, reified as they have traditionally been, have helped structure the scholarly milieus in which contemporary medievalists and early modernists work. Narratives concerning the transition from medieval to early modern underlie and help construct ideas about modernity that constitute our own intuitions about our present place in history. Hence the objection, first voiced some time ago but still true nevertheless, that the medieval as a category too often operates as an anterior Other against which narratives of advancing modernity (as characterized by liberal individualism, by Protestantism or secularization, by incipient nationalism, capitalism, or the invention of the human) can be poised.⁷

The conventional wisdom about period that this book seeks to interrogate rests upon a number of interlocking master narratives concerning the transition from the medieval to the early modern, each of which is now subject to considerable debate but which cumulatively still underpin an idea of historical rupture that largely determines our period specializations. One of these—originally based on an idea of the Dark Ages that has been used to re-make the present for half a millennium by now—is the story of the Renaissance as the rebirth of the individual. Though the Burckhardtian form of this story hardly requires rehearsal or rebuttal today, the idea that there is something uniquely modern about Renaissance subjects and their characteristic styles of self-fashioning and inwardness remains vital as an assumption within early modern literary studies despite the occasional protest from the medievalist in the next office.⁸ We are now much less likely than we once were to see this optimistically, as a Renaissance, though. Instead, in the work of Stephen

⁷ See for instance the following: Lee Patterson, 'On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies', *Speculum* 65 (1990), 87–108; David Aers, 'A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing "The History of the Subject"', in *idem* (ed.), *Culture and History 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1992), 177–202; Kathleen Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998), 611–37; Sarah Beckwith, 'Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet* and the Forms of Oblivion', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003), 261–80.

⁸ On this see especially Aers, 'A Whisper'.

Greenblatt and others, the early modern subject is figured in terms of the loss of the sacred, holistic medieval world, nostalgically recollected, of which the individual might once have been a part.⁹ The philosopher Charles Taylor calls this process ‘the Great Disembedding’, and sees it as a key, constitutive part of the emergence of ‘the way we collectively imagine, even pretheoretically, our social life in the contemporary Western world’.¹⁰ Though early modernists may themselves feel a certain nostalgia for the Middle Ages conceived of as the time before this epoch-making shift in the social imaginary, it leads to the secularized genius of Shakespeare (not to mention the discriminating eye of the modern critic), and so can never be felt to be wholly a bad thing.

In this historicist stereotype, medieval Europe stands as paradise lost, with Shakespeare and his contemporaries cast in the role of postlapsarian moderns, brilliant, haunted, and skeptical, gathering up the pieces of a broken world. Thanks in part to the work of medievalists like David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, who have worked to discredit this view of the history of the subject, and of early modernists like Katharine Eisaman Maus, whose 1995 book *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* decisively decoupled the study of early modern ideas of inwardness from more grandiose notions about the emergence of the modern self, we are now less likely than we were in the 1980s and early 1990s to see claims about the emergent modern subject offered up unproblematically.¹¹ But it is one thing to discredit a specific line of argument and another to dismantle the stereotypes about period that have grown up around it. Much of the most interesting work in early modern literary studies during the past ten years has attempted to relocate and complicate received wisdom about the modern subject—by focusing upon its problematic embodiment, for instance, or upon what Cynthia Marshall describes as its experience of shattering and fragmentation—but for the most part this project has gone forward without attempting to falsify the more foundational assumption that the modern subject in fact emerged as a distinct entity.¹²

⁹ See Beckwith, ‘Stephen Greenblatt’s *Hamlet*’.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), 49–76.

¹¹ See Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹² Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002). See also David Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism, and the Interior of the Body* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

The idea of the early modern emergence of the modern subject is by now inextricably entangled with two other dominant narratives of transition: the idea of the early modern birth of capitalism and the idea of the Reformation as the decisive moment in which an older medieval world was set aside. The Reformation, of course, took place near the beginning of the period we in English studies designate as early modernity or as the Renaissance. And so, most would agree, did some kind of transformation in the economic organization of human relations. What remains controversial, in each case, is the nature of these changes: how we think of their implications and what continuities and discontinuities they therefore imply. Once upon a time, the English Reformation was understood in Whiggish terms, as the triumph of Protestantism as a progressive force. But recent scholarship has instead emphasized the persistent appeal of traditional religion in England despite official efforts at reform, a perspective that makes it possible to speak of significant areas of continuity in the spiritual lives of English men and women despite the change in the state church.¹³ In the case of economic transformation, the theories of Robert Brenner and his followers have made it possible to think of capitalism as emerging in England out of internal contradictions of pre-capitalist society, a perspective that makes it possible to speak of capitalism as a by-product or continuation of medieval practices rather than just as a departure from them.¹⁴

This narrative of revolutionary transformation from medieval to early modern has also, of course, been reinforced by a political history emphasizing the emergence and strengthening of centralized monarchy, a development that provided the newly modern subject with a suitably modern state to inhabit. This argument advances on two related fronts. The first of these has to do with the idea that the sixteenth century saw the emergence of the modern nation-state. The sociologist Liah Greenfeld, in a well-known and controversial study, sees early Tudor England as the first modern nation, and literary scholars have likewise been interested in the sixteenth-century emergence

¹³ See, for an early instance of this line of argument, the critique of A. G. Dickens's *The English Reformation* in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987). See also Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

¹⁴ Debates about the origins of capitalism are ably summarized in Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 11–64.

of new forms of nationalized social imaginary.¹⁵ This claim is closely linked to (though by no means coterminous with) the idea, established more than fifty years ago by G. R. Elton, that the 1530s and 1540s witnessed a 'revolution in government' which set the monarchy on a sound bureaucratic footing by shifting the work of government away from the King's personal household attendants and creating a more modern-seeming style of rationalized central government.¹⁶ But though it remains true that Tudor England saw an expansion of government and a shift toward increasingly nationalized ways of thinking about monarchy and sovereignty, it is by no means clear that Elton's modernizing, bureaucratic revolution ever took place. David Starkey and others have demonstrated the persistence of household government through the reigns of the Tudors and beyond, and Starkey, in particular, has argued that the more important transformation occurred in the mid-fifteenth century when people began to imagine sovereignty in terms of the good of the 'commonwealth'.¹⁷ As with the other master narratives of historical rupture, this challenge to the idea of a Henrician revolution in government paves the way for a reassessment of the continuities and discontinuities in government and political theory across the medieval/early modern divide.

None of this is meant to imply that our conventional period designations have no meaning. Certainly no one would debate the catalytic importance of developments like the Reformation, the invention of the printing press, or the discovery and colonization of the so-called New World. We do suggest, however, that the self-reinforcing confluence of these stories of modernization (especially in England, where what we call Renaissance and what we call Reformation are so closely contemporaneous) has encouraged scholars—and particularly early modernists—to imagine historical change as rupture or revolution and therefore to disregard the implications of areas of overlap and continuity in their approach to historical explanations. This has been especially true during

¹⁵ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992). On the writing of Elizabethan nationalism see especially Richard Helgerson's seminal *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁶ G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1953).

¹⁷ For a rebuttal of Elton's thesis see Christopher Coleman and David Starkey (eds), *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the Histories of Tudor Government and Administration* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986). On the mid-fifteenth-century emergence of the language of commonwealth, see Starkey's essay in that volume, entitled 'Which Age of Reform?', 13–27.

the ascendancy within early modern studies of that nebulous field of literary scholarship known as New Historicism, which has tended to sidestep questions of historical transformation by relying upon a Foucauldian historiography of unexplained and unexamined epistemic change that avoids the problem of period instead of addressing it.

The problem of periodicity that this volume addresses is thus nested in turn within the historiographical problem of teleology. For this reason, Étienne Balibar has become a key theoretical guide underpinning our work on this book: Balibar discusses the emergence of modernity non-teleologically by displacing the threat and promise of infinity from the historian's present to the past that he or she describes in its openness to multiple futurities. In criticizing prior Marxist narratives that treated the coalescence of the nation-state as a consequence of emerging capitalism, for example, Balibar stresses that '*state forms other than the national have emerged and have for a time competed with it, before finally being repressed or instrumentalized: the form of empire and, most importantly, that of the transnational politico-commercial complex, centred on one or more cities.*' As Balibar reminds us, in contrasting the experiences of the Hanseatic League and the United Provinces with that of *ancien régime* France, European history finally offers no evidence asserting the conjunction of capitalism and the nation as a necessary criterion of modernity.¹⁸ It could have happened differently. We have attempted to keep this essential piece of wisdom in mind even while discussing aspects of the age of Shakespeare that prefigure modernity in telling ways.

Maintaining a sharp division between the medieval and the early modern has been valuable, in terms of institutional prestige, for early modernists. This is why the most trenchant critiques of caricatured or stereotyped assumptions about the transition have thus far come from medievalists. This challenge to the self-fashioning of early modernism has never been more urgent than it is right now, thanks in large part to James Simpson's magisterial and ambitious recent survey of the period of transition, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*.¹⁹ Simpson's book can be read as a salvo in this disciplinary turf war, an attempt to make the case that we should value medieval culture more than we have

¹⁸ Étienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 86–106, 89, emphasis Balibar's.

¹⁹ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution, 1350–1547* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

and value Renaissance culture less. For Simpson argues that the early sixteenth century experienced a cultural revolution stemming from the simplification and centralization of jurisdictional and institutional authority, and that this revolution extended to a narrowing of thought and expression manifested in the literature of the period as well. This argument effectively preserves the idea of the Middle Ages as paradise lost while denying the early modern period its corresponding claim to intellectual superiority.

There can be no question but that *Reform and Cultural Revolution* is a major achievement and, by extension, that it makes a persuasive case that there was a cultural revolution with something like the general contours Simpson suggests in the early sixteenth century. But a work of this kind—a massive act of synthesizing imagination drawing on the work of myriad specialists in multiple disciplines—is bound by its very structure to replicate some of the key, pre-existing assumptions of the scholarly fields from which it draws. To give but one example, Simpson's chapter on politics relies on Elton's outmoded account of the Tudor revolution in government to establish a clear and overstated break in political order, and then uses that as the scaffolding for a nuanced and insightful discussion of a range of political literature from Chaucer and Hoccleve through Skelton and More.²⁰ The point here is not to quibble, churlishly, with a single omission in a massively learned and important book, but rather to suggest how the structure of this kind of synthesizing work winds up recapitulating the logic of disciplinary distinctions even as it remaps them. One cannot simultaneously synthesize the work of others and start from scratch, and so we might say that even the most radically revisionist of overviews is likely to be dependent upon some aspects of the received wisdom about periodicity governing the prior organization of the field under discussion.

The essay collection, as a form, is the inverse of the synthetic literary history, and its strengths are likewise of an opposite variety. Part of the objective of this book is to decouple and so reconfigure these linked stories of transformation so that individual aspects of continuity and discontinuity might be considered afresh. The traditional conjoining of so many theoretically distinct and variably accurate ways of thinking about the transition from medieval to early modern

²⁰ Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, 191–254. For Elton, see *Tudor Revolution*, 195–6. For a more substantive critique of this chapter see Thomas Betteridge, 'The Henrician Reformation and Mid-Tudor Culture', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), 91–109.

has created, we argue, an overly rigid sense of periodicity that obscures even as it illuminates. It is time to dissect this body of public knowledge about the past in order to create new ways of thinking and working for the present and future.

It is important, too, for early modernists to participate in this re-examination. For if the dominant paradigms concerning the transition from medieval to early modern have been structured according to the disciplinary agendas of early modernists, the counter-reformation inaugurated by Simpson threatens to be determined by the interests of medievalists. In each case, the field of inquiry is impoverished by the asymmetry. In their introduction to a recent special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* dedicated to Simpson's book, David Aers and Sarah Beckwith describe how they asked several sixteenth-century scholars to contribute essays but wound up being unable to recruit more than one non-medievalist for the project.²¹ *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, though, is fully collaborative in the sense that the contributors bring to the project varied expertise in both medieval and early modern literary culture. Several, including Beckwith, Rebecca Krug, William Kuskin, and Karen Sawyer Marsalek, are primarily medievalists. Patrick Cheney, Christopher Warley, Brian Walsh, and Curtis Perry have primarily worked as early modernists. And three of our contributors—Elizabeth Fowler, John Watkins, and Michael O'Connell—have published extensively in both fields.

Shakespeare and the Middle Ages is organized around three distinct but inter-related theoretical approaches to the volume's central concerns. The essays in the first section—entitled 'Texts in Transition'—grapple with questions of historical change and the transmission of culture. They explore how literature can allow us to glimpse moments of historical transition in at least something of their original contingency, long before their eventual incorporation into modern narratives about the waning of the Middle Ages or the triumph of the Renaissance. Instead of treating literary texts as medieval or early modern, our contributors in this section expose the tensions and internal divisions inherent in historical changes as felt by articulate subjects living through them. Christopher Warley, for example, demonstrates how the poem 'A Lover's Complaint', traditionally attributed to Shakespeare, articulates

²¹ David Aers and Sarah Beckwith, 'Reform and Cultural Revolution: Introduction', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35 (2005), 5–6.

as-yet unconsolidated ways of thinking about class and social distinction in a period of transition. Like Balibar, Warley insists on the open-endedness of historical and literary historical development. So, though Warley analyzes the importance in the poem of medieval languages of property and ownership in relation to theories concerning the transition from feudalism to capitalism, he rejects a style of Marxist reading that would seek to situate the poem on any stable trajectory between a feudal past and a capitalist present. Instead, Warley suggests that we should understand the work done by a poem like 'A Lover's Complaint' in terms of its articulation of new social positions constructed as and in terms of commodification. In this way, his essay simultaneously offers a neo-Marxist critique of extant models of historical transition and reads 'A Lover's Complaint' as articulating transition itself.

Sarah Beckwith's essay on 'Shakespeare's Resurrections' similarly resists the historiographic attractions of a rigid opposition between a unitary Catholic medieval past and an equally unitary Reformed present. The essay begins as a commentary on 'resurrected' characters like Hero, Claudio, and Hermione, who appear 'present as reminders of an ineradicable past that must be confronted in the lives and thoughts—in the self-recognition—of those to whom they so hauntingly return'. But as the argument unfolds, Beckwith explores those characters as embodiments of a medieval theology of grace and penitence that, far from being repudiated by the Reformation, arguably achieves its strongest articulation in the writings of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Shakespeare's late plays, Beckwith argues, and in particular *The Winter's Tale*, draw upon medieval paradigms of resurrection in order to create what she calls a 'grammar of theater' capable of re-imagining this theology even in the wake of the Reformation.

Like Beckwith, Elizabeth Fowler finds in Shakespearean drama a post-Reformation recasting of forms of community once produced via the sacraments of the medieval church. But instead of reading the significance of sacramental community primarily in theological terms, Fowler suggests that we see in it an important form of social contract theory that has typically not been recognized as such because of the pre-enlightenment vocabularies in which it is couched. So, she suggests, a great deal of early modern 'economic and political thought about what glues human beings together into polities grows out of sacramental discourse and its constructions of intention, interests, and the passions.' From this perspective, the obsessive interest in contracts and bonds in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*—in the way they forge communities and also in the recurring and disturbing ways in which they fail to do so—

can be read as Shakespeare's response to the felt need for a post-Reformation theory of the social contract capable of handling questions of intention and the efficacy of language previously associated with sacramental theology.

Finally, John Watkins's study of historiography and nationalism challenges the Anglocentricism dominating prior accounts of Shakespeare and historical transition by situating his *King John* at the dawn of an international system based on abstract notions of the state rather than dynastic right. That is, the play was composed from within the transition from one conception of the state to another, and so, Watkins argues, we miss the point if we try to read its political story in terms of long-settled modern ideas concerning nation and state. Instead of seeing Shakespeare's play as part of either a modern, nation-based political mentality or a pre-modern, dynastic one, Watkins reads *King John* as a document in transition, a fiction whose ideological fissures and slip-pages themselves provide us with a kind of snapshot of how an emergent idea of the state could and could not be conceptualized by those experiencing conceptual change from within.

Our second section focuses on self-conscious 'Medievalism in Shakespearean England'. For Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the Middle Ages had a present, binding reality that is hard for us to imagine four centuries later. Most of the laws that governed the country were instituted in prior centuries, and even the new ones were based on medieval precedents. Protestantism offered a vernacular liturgy, but as the more radical reformers continually complained, its outlines were essentially those of the Latin mass. Even the churches in which they worshiped and many of the buildings in which they lived and worked dated from the Middle Ages. When poets looked for English models to inspire their work, they turned to Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower, and Hoccleve. The country was profoundly conservative in the sense that authority was typically derived from and anchored in the exemplarity of the past.

But as tangible and powerful as that past might have seemed, it was also subject to continual revision and ultimately reinvention. Politicians and ecclesiastics were quick to claim medieval precedents where none actually existed, at least in a sense that would satisfy the canons of modern historical inquiry. The Chaucer hailed as the father of English literature by writers like Spenser was in part a Renaissance creation. In investigating Shakespeare's role in the simultaneous reception and invention of the Middle Ages, the essays in this section steer a delicate course between historiographic realism and nominalism. As modern scholars, they eschew an older, almost fundamentalist

belief in a medieval past that had such an absolute and immutable character that it could always be distinguished from Shakespeare's fictions. At the same time, they also nuance a more recent nominalism that reduces the past to nothing but a fiction. The Shakespeare that each posits engages the Middle Ages in a complex, dialectic and dialogic fashion. He simultaneously fashions and inherits a past that exists both outside and within his fiction.

Like Christopher Warley, Patrick Cheney finds some of the strongest traces connecting Shakespeare to the medieval past in the love poetry rather than the plays. Cheney's essay on 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' explores Shakespeare's creation of a new model for the literary career on the basis of heuristic recollections both of Chaucer and of Spenser's prior medievalizing gestures in *The Shepheardes Calender*. Shakespeare's conception of authorial career is novel, ambitious, and in some ways epoch-making. Nevertheless, Cheney's intertextual analysis reminds us how our understanding of Shakespeare's career is impoverished if we allow rigid period distinctions to distance him from the well-springs of an English poetic tradition whose contours run counter to our own customary disciplinary categories.

William Kuskin also addresses questions of authorship and literary authority in his essay on 'recursive origins' in 2 *Henry VI*. But whereas Cheney's emphases fall on Shakespeare's departures from his medieval models, Kuskin stresses continuities by examining how Shakespearean drama engages with conceptions of textual authority inherited from the literary culture of the fifteenth century. Literary history often erases the fifteenth century, Kuskin argues, focusing instead on earlier Chaucerian innovations and on the innovations of the sixteenth-century Renaissance. But for Kuskin, sixteenth-century literary culture has a profound, if ambivalent, relationship to an interest in the problematics of literary reproduction that is in fact characteristic of the previous century. Kuskin's essay focuses upon the way that Shakespeare's *The First Part of the Contention* preserves, thematizes, and in some ways resists complicated ideas of literary and cultural authority derived from fifteenth-century texts. More generally, with its fifteenth-century focus, Kuskin's essay marks a powerful intervention in a literary historical discourse that has tended to reduce the assessment of modernity's relationship to the Middle Ages to the question of major sixteenth-century writers' relationships to Chaucer.

Brian Walsh's 'Chantry, Chronicle, and Cockpit: *Henry V* and the Forms of History' also discusses Shakespeare's self-positioning vis-à-vis earlier forms of knowledge and authority. Here, though, the focus is on Shakespeare's

relation to antecedent forms of historical memorialization: for Walsh, *Henry V* is a kind of historiographical tour de force, a play that depicts and so thematizes medieval forms of history and compares them implicitly to the performed history practiced in the play's own wooden O. Walsh's essay emphatically rejects the Whiggish implication that Shakespeare's historical imagination was more sophisticated than medieval forms of historical memory, but argues nevertheless that by differentiating the historical representations produced in commercial theater with the forms of history staged as medieval within the play, *Henry V* creates something like the disciplinary distinction that the present volume aims to interrogate. In this way, Walsh's reading of Shakespeare as a historiographical thinker resonates with Cheney's argument about the way Shakespeare creates a new model of authorship out of a medieval tradition.

Curtis Perry's essay provides a kind of postscript to this section on Shakespeare's medievalism, supplementing its focus upon Shakespeare's self-conscious and interrogatory uses of the past by reminding us of the sheer heterogeneity of Renaissance medievalism. Where scholars interested in the Elizabethan emergence of nationalist ideas have focused extensively upon Shakespeare's two tetralogies, Perry examines instead a series of non-Shakespearean history plays that contribute to early modern conceptions of Englishness by returning to stories of Norman and Danish conquest in the eleventh century. As in Watkins's essay, what is at stake here are narratives about the emergence of the modern nation-state, and Perry's essay serves as a reminder that a too-exclusive focus on Shakespearean dramas of national identity produces a reductive and potentially teleological story of emergent nationalism in Tudor and early Stuart England.

Our final section, 'Shakespeare and the Resources of Medieval Culture', challenges prevailing ideas of Shakespeare—as inventor of the modern subject or as Renaissance man—by resituating his plays in relation to native artistic, theatrical, narrative, and ethical traditions inherited from the Middle Ages. In doing so, essays in this section also interrogate notions of modernity that have been facilitated by the idea of Shakespeare's unique genius and the supposed crudeness of putatively pre-modern art and culture. Michael O'Connell's essay on *King Lear* and the morality theater, for example, counters a critical tradition dating back to Chambers and Spivack that credited Shakespeare with transforming medieval allegories into the basis for the mimetic theater characteristic not only of modernity but of

literary greatness itself. Where his precursors found disjunction and discontinuity, O'Connell sees eerie points of continuity. O'Connell's *King Lear* is an Everyman continually advertising his indebtedness to modes of thought that twenty-first-century audiences have been too quick to see as inherently medieval.

Whereas O'Connell focuses on Shakespeare's relationship to the fifteenth-century moralities, Karen Marsalek discovers an important resource for Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the mystery cycles. In particular, Marsalek focuses on true and false Resurrection in mystery plays and on the re-use of these motifs in early modern drama. Originally associated with Antichrist figures, images of false Resurrection operate in early modern professional theater both to signal kinds of political tyranny associated with the Antichrist and as a metatheatrical trope commenting upon the unreliability of theatrical representation itself. Far from seeing the medieval cycle plays as amateurish productions redeemed by the greater artistry of Shakespeare's professional theater, Marsalek upholds them as sites of profound reflection on the relationship between truth and artifice to which Shakespeare returns at critical stages throughout his career.

Our final essay, by Rebecca Krug, focuses on the medieval roots of *The Merchant of Venice*, a topic that is in itself striking, since it is so easy to see the play's mercantile or proto-capitalist concerns as utterly modern. Krug's essay argues that both medieval and early modern readers of stories from the *Gesta Romanorum* were as likely to read them as narrative thought experiments exploring moral issues as they were to read them as spiritual allegories, and that they cast light on Shakespeare's play if we imagine him reading them in this way as well. Students of Shakespeare's play will know the *Gesta* as a source for the casket test episode, of course, but Krug demonstrates that Shakespeare's indebtedness to this collection goes well beyond that. We have been prevented from seeing the *Gesta* stories as a rich resource for Shakespeare's moral imagination, Krug suggests, by a critical tradition that treats them as merely allegorical and that thus separates them from the more worldly (read: more modern) moral concerns of Shakespeare's play. Thus, her essay suggests, thinking about Shakespeare's use of stories from the *Gesta Romanorum* can cast light simultaneously on *The Merchant of Venice* (whose ethical concerns will look more medieval) and on the *Gesta* stories themselves (which themselves look richer once they are liberated from an exclusively allegorical mode of reading).

The essays collected here do not subscribe to a single interpretation of modernity's emergence from its antecedents. But they all remind us, in powerful ways, of modernity's contingency. Shakespeare's recreation of the Middle Ages is both foundational to our historical point of view—he asked the right questions—and something so alien to us that our instinct is to dismiss it: he got it wrong. In the interplay between what he gets right and what he gets wrong, the sensitive reader can find the traces of divergent trajectories into the future we now call the modern.

PART I

TEXTS IN TRANSITION

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Shakespeare's Fickle Fee-Simple

A Lover's Complaint, Nostalgia, and the Transition
from Feudalism to Capitalism

Christopher Warley

The first adjective used to describe the central character in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*—a maid who has been seduced by a young man—is 'fickle', and 'fickle' seems a pretty good description of the poem generally.¹ Everything in the poem appears changeable, inconstant, unreliable, and perhaps—in an older sense of the word—false, deceitful, and treacherous. This mutability of the poem has generally been taken as a bad thing: readers have tended to find it hard going, and criticism has by and large not been kind. The work has regularly been seen (apologetically) as unfinished or (optimistically) as not by Shakespeare.² Whatever one thinks about such arguments, the shiftiness

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. John Kerrigan (London: Penguin, 1986), 157, line 5. All further citations of *A Lover's Complaint* refer to this edition with line numbers indicated parenthetically in the text.

² For an overview of the tradition, see Kerrigan (ed.), *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, 389–90; *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 138–40; and the introduction to *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's A Lover's Complaint: Suffering Ecstasy*, ed. Shirley Sharon-Zisser (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1–53. Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, A Lover's Complaint, and John Davies of Hereford* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007) argues that Davies, not Shakespeare, is the author. Because my primary concern is with reading the poem to re-imagine the transition question, I take no position on the issue of attribution and refer to the poem as Shakespeare's out of habit, not conviction.

and difficulty—call it the ‘transitoriness’—of the work remain conspicuous. Writing in 1922, J. Denton Snider registered the confusion many readers have felt: the poem, he lamented, ‘employs no Greek Mythos (like *Venus and Adonis*), no Roman Tale (like *Lucrece*) for its scaffolding’.³ Without a scaffold, *A Lover's Complaint* seems simply to fall down.

Thanks mostly to John Kerrigan's path-breaking work, this structural fickleness can now be seen in part as a function of the poem's genre—‘female complaint’. The genre descends in part from Ovid's *Heroides*, and it had a thriving Old English and medieval life. In the second half of the sixteenth century, it became especially popular, with other contemporary examples including Lodge's *Complaint of Elstred*, Spenser's *The Ruines of Time*, and Daniel's *The Complaint of Rosamond*.⁴ Snider's apprehension about the lack of ‘scaffolding’ around *A Lover's Complaint*, though, is certainly not misguided. The genre is, almost by definition, a bit inscrutable. For Kerrigan, female complaints are ‘miniature devices for generating interpretive instability’, and Sasha Roberts likewise stresses that the genre is ‘fraught with paradoxes’.⁵ Any scaffolding one encounters is always, seemingly, in the process of being dismantled, and *A Lover's Complaint* in particular seems to go out of its way to intensify destabilizing effects.

This fickleness extends to the poem's position in literary and social history as well. If everything in the poem seems transitory, the poem also seems to be in part about the fickleness of historical transition. In a literary sense, the poem points in two directions. On one hand, Kerrigan details deep similarities between this work and poems several hundred years older. On the other hand, the weirdness of the poem's language and syntax seems practically baroque, anticipating poems such as Marvell's ‘The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn’. These literary issues, in turn, point to broader social issues: the poem's fickle position in past, present, and future makes sense in terms of the

³ Denton Jacques Snider, *A Biography of William Shakespeare, Set forth as his Life Drama* (St Louis: William Harvey Miner Co., 1922); quoted in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Poems*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1938), 600.

⁴ See John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint'*, *A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁵ Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, 12, who nevertheless tends to stress that complaint as a genre tended to reinforce patriarchy: the genre ‘was embedded in belying and bemonstering relations which framed texts reinforced and which Heroidean texts could not dismantle, and which directed the energies of the form into male constructions of femininity’ (82). Sasha Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 150.

social and economic history of the period. The poem participates, I will argue, in what Marxist historiography calls the ‘transition’ question, the problem of how one broad and multifaceted social organization (feudalism) eventually gave way to another broad, multifaceted social organization (capitalism). What readers have tended to find exasperating about *A Lover's Complaint*, I suspect, is at least partially the poem's uncanny embodiment of this historical transition.

One way of starting to make sense of the poem's fickleness, then, is by turning to Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*. The first two-thirds of Wood's book provide an almost effortless introduction to the often abstruse and (it's best to be up front about such things) dry scholarship surrounding the so-called transition debate. Wood is especially indebted to the arguments of Robert Brenner, whose work provides a striking answer to the old question of what, exactly, the transition from feudalism to capitalism consisted. One assumption of the transition debate, Wood remarks, ‘always appeared to be that capitalism emerged when obstacles to the realization of market *opportunities* were removed.’ As a result, capitalism appears as a largely natural phenomenon (say, a human instinct for barter and trade, often called ‘commercialism’) that overcame a number of artificial impediments (say, feudalism). Instead, Brenner tries to explain the transition debate ‘without reading capitalist principles back into pre-capitalist societies—without, that is, assuming the very thing that needs to be explained’. Rather than the gradual unfolding of an innate commercial impulse, capitalism emerges in Brenner's thesis as an unintended product of the internal logic of feudalism. As feudal lords and peasants try to reinforce their property arrangements, they accidentally create the circumstances in which ‘producers became subject to market *imperatives*’; in other words, lords and peasants create the conditions under which market participation is no longer a choice, but they do so as they work to bolster, not change, their current social positions.⁶

⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (New York: Verso, 2002), 50. See also Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflicts, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003), esp. 638–716; *idem*, ‘Feudalism’, in *The New Palgrave: Marxian Economics*, ed. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 170–85; and *idem*, ‘Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism’, in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 271–304. Robert S. DuPlessis, *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) is also an excellent introduction to the transition question in Europe.

There are many difficulties with Brenner's argument, some of which are collected in *The Brenner Debate*.⁷ In addition to the Malthusian critique leveled at Brenner, a more pressing difficulty, in my view, is his argument's economic essentialism. Despite their sharp differences with other Marxist models, both Brenner and Wood remain committed to a (more or less) classic Marxist model of social development: the real historical action happens in the economy (for them, agrarianism and landlord–peasant property relations), and everything else in the world, including poems, is viewed as largely a symptom. At the same time, poststructural critiques of such 'economicism' have notorious difficulty with describing historical change.⁸ The recent scholarly reluctance to use terms like 'feudalism' or 'capitalism', or to narrow their use to a mere technical explanation, signals for me less a rejection of totalizing models and teleological narratives than what Slavoj Žižek terms a tacit 'resignation' that capitalism is inevitable and natural—the transhistorical 'commercialism' that Wood describes.⁹ The ability of Brenner and Wood to describe the transition from feudalism to capitalism as not teleological—as, rather, accidental—may consequently be just what poststructural historicism needs. And conversely, reading a poem whose generic roots stretch across the transition might help extricate Wood and Brenner from the economic determinism in their arguments. My ambition, then, is to use Brenner and poststructuralism as supplements to one another to start to re-imagine, and reintroduce, the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. *A Lover's Complaint* plays a role in this transition because it helps to create new social positions out of the logic of older social relations. It creates them not by rejecting or sharply breaking from medieval and feudal concepts but by intensifying them to the point that they transform into something different.

⁷ See T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).

⁸ See *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, 'Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!', in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Verso, 2000), 90–135, 93. On the universalization of capitalism as commercialism, see Wood, *Origin of Capitalism*, 11–33. For a useful, if technically narrow, critique of the term 'feudalism', see Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994). The now-classic rejection of capitalism as an essentializing concept is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985; rpt. New York: Verso, 2001).

In order to try to understand the transitory position of *A Lover's Complaint*, as well as its position in transition, I begin by examining the links between the poem's fickleness and its generic structures. The first section analyzes the complex formal operation of the work—what I will call its 'discontent'—while the second, longer section tries to unpack the historical implications of these formal difficulties. At a number of crucial junctures, *A Lover's Complaint* turns nostalgically back to the language of feudal property law to help sort out its formal difficulties, but these moments seem, paradoxically, some of the most modern. The nostalgic construction of feudalism in the poem, I will argue, is in part an effect of the particular process of abstraction we see gaining momentum in the Renaissance. Such nostalgia is, moreover, an integral part of the transition from medieval to Renaissance: longing for a real source of value, or a real grounding of a personality, is essential for the operation of commodification. My thesis is that the poem's combination of the old genre of the female complaint and a feudal vocabulary of property rights articulates a new understanding of social relations in the seventeenth century. By running the language of feudal property through the formal paradoxes of the female complaint, *A Lover's Complaint* ends up participating in the creation of genuinely new, commodified social positions produced out of a compulsive nostalgia. To put this in a way that reworks Brenner's primary thesis about the transition: the urge to reinforce what one takes to be the true origin of value, the urge to reinforce what one takes to be one's true social position, makes capitalism emerge.

I.

Probably the first place readers encounter the fickleness of the poem is the simple question: who is speaking? It is not an easy question to answer. Most of the work consists of a fickle maid recounting her seduction by a young man, but we never exactly hear her voice. The poem instead consists of the voice of an unnamed speaker, an 'I', who hears and reports a maid's account of her seduction. Much of the maid's complaint, in turn, consists of her recounting to a pastoral shepherd, a 'reverend man', the speeches of the fair youth who seduced her. The poem is thus a frame in a frame in a frame, a *mise en abyme*—the maid's complaining, including her recounting of the youth's speeches, while the reverend man listens to her, while, in turn, the 'I' of the first stanza

also overhears her and ultimately reports the maid's laments. In other words, the complaint of the maid about her seduction is elaborately and continually doubled. Such complex frames are an integral part of the complaint genre and are partially responsible for the genre's instability. For hundreds of years, complaints were characterized by a complex interaction between a male narrator or auditor and a female speaker. This framing of the female voice by a male frame, suggests Kerrigan, sometimes resulted in patriarchal moralizing: the female's complaint becomes a didactic example against social transgressions. But not always, and certainly not in Shakespeare's poem, for her example might easily tend to undermine whatever moral manages to emerge. What distinguishes Shakespeare's use of the genre is his intensification of this instability: '[T]he "I" of Shakespeare's poem', Kerrigan notes, 'conspicuously placed but deliberately invisible, an interested but cautious eavesdropper . . . carries to an extreme traits apparent in the 1300s.'¹⁰ Determining who the 'I' of the poem is (and determining how we might determine that) itself becomes a primary critical issue.

The result of this elaborate doubling is that we can never be fully confident who is speaking: after all, when we hear the voice of the maid, we are, at least technically, hearing the voice of the narrator retelling her story. But this narrative 'I', which ostensibly frames the entire narrative, the poem's putative originating voice, is no more stable than the maid. The 'I' has no gender spelled out, and this uncertainty intensifies and is intensified by the elaborate framing devices around the 'I' itself. The origin of the voice is displaced into a procedure: instead of a stable poetic scaffold, the narrating 'I' rapidly dissolves into at best semi-autonomy in the opening stanza:

From off a hill whose concave womb reworded
A plaintful story from a sist'ring vale,
My spirits t'attend this double voice accorded,

¹⁰ Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, 13, and his very subtle discussion of the poem's gender dynamics (44). Katharine Craik, 'Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Early Modern Criminal Confession', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2003), 437–59, similarly suggests that the poem 'throws the regulatory, didactic function of early modern confessional lament into doubt, and this goes some way toward accounting for the chary reaction of many critics to the poem' (459). Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems*, stresses that 'it is the female complainant who not only dominates the poem but has the last word' (150). Roberts builds on the sentiments of Ilona Bell, "'That which thou hast done": Shakespeare's Sonnets and *A Lover's Complaint*', in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Garland, 2000), 455–74.

And down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale;
 Ere long espied a fickle maid full pale,
 Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain,
 Storming her world with sorrow's wind and rain. (1–7)

What is the 'sad-tuned tale' that the speaker 'lists'? It's not at all clear that the initial 'plaintful story', though gendered female, belongs to the maid. Instead, there appears a 'double voice' that seems to emerge out of the Ovidian 'concave womb' of the hill itself. Metamorphosis here continually is deferred: rather than originating in the womb, this is a disembodied, echoed voice 'from a sist'ring vale', always 'reworded', always 'double voiced', always overheard, always reported. The voice of the poem originates in its rewording, a process both feminine ('from a sist'ring vale') and masculine (since the 'I' tends to be male in complaints as a genre). Social class is equally unstable. The shapeless voice that starts the poem also frames the speaker and makes him passively lie down and 'attend' like a servant. The master 'I', which nominally organizes the entire poem, turns out to be, at the same time, subordinated to the very voice he is apparently imposing.

What this indeterminate 'I' finally sees and reports is the fickle maid '[s]torming her world with sorrow's wind and rain' by 'Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain' (7, 6). In the course of the poem, it becomes clear that these papers and rings are gifts the young man has given to her as part of his seduction—'folded schedules', 'ring[s] of posied gold and bone', and 'deep-brained sonnets' (43, 45, 209). In tearing these tokens up, the maid reacts to, and tries to destroy, the fact of her own beguilement. She cries out

'O false blood, thou register of lies,
 What unapproved witness dost thou bear!
 Ink would have seemed more black and damnèd here.'
 This said, in top of rage the lines she rents,
 Big discontent so breaking their contents. (52–6)

Her 'big discontent' breaks the 'contents' of the papers: the joke of the last line, of course, is that the 'contents' of the papers also contain the maid's *contentment*, her happiness. Tearing up the sonnets stages the tearing up of the maid herself so that her 'contents' are no longer clear. Where are the borders of her internal happiness? What marks her 'content'? The 'discontent' which the poem articulates makes it impossible to say with any precision where the 'borders' of the maid are.

This process of discontenting content is a general characteristic of the entire work, an intensification of the deconstructive tendencies in the complaint genre. Nearly every statement in the poem undermines itself. The auditor to whom the maid delivers her complaint, a 'reverend man, that grazed his cattle nigh,' turns out to be not a pastoral shepherd but a former courtier, 'a blusterer, that the ruffle knew' (although his fakeness may make him a more authentic pastoral figure). Such discontentment also appears in the fair youth who seduces the maid. His not-so-fair 'brownny locks' hang in dangerously misleading 'crooked curls' (85), and he is 'by nature's outwards so commended | That maidens' eyes stuck over all his face' (80–1). But the maidens' eyes stick less from 'nature's outwards', the youth's beauty, than from his elusiveness: 'Each eye that saw him did enchant the mind; | For on his visage was in little drawn | What largeness *thinks* in paradise was sawn' (90–1, my emphasis).

The effects of such description are consequently paradoxical. On the one hand, the poem is a monument to a sort of de Manian literariness: if ever a work could be said to deconstruct itself, this is it. On the other hand, the ambiguity tends to reinforce the inscrutable autonomy of the figures. They don't only manifest the incongruity of language but rather acquire more social distinctiveness through that very incongruity. The youth's discontentment gives him his creepy, totalizing power over everyone from courtiers to nuns, apparent in his shrugging take on his many love conquests: 'They sought their shame that so their shame did find' (187), he says.

Despite its association with a serial debaucher like the fair youth, such autonomy is not simply the purview of masculine hegemony. It defines the fickle maid as well. Consider the initial account of her:

Upon her head a platted hive of straw,
Which fortified her visage from the sun,
Whereon the thought might think sometime it saw
The carcass of a beauty spent and done.
Time had not scythèd all that youth begun,
Nor youth all quit, but spite of heaven's fell rage
Some beauty peeped through lattice of seared age. (8–14)

Readers are put in the position of the sun, for the 'platted hive of straw' fortifies the maid from the rays of our gaze as well. How old is she? What does she look like? Thomas Roche remarks that '[s]he is old but not old...her hair is

both up and down, in her hat and out.’¹¹ We are left with thinking thoughts drawing their own conclusions, peeping through the lattice of the description, just as her beauty and age (whatever they are) peer out at us. The maid always remains fortified against our thought, the platted hive marking a conceptual boundary we cannot exactly cross. If her gender places her in a subordinate position to the fair youth, her similarity to the youth’s elusiveness, also marks the eerie power of her voice and her gaze that we barely discern lurking behind her straw hat.

Because of such formal discontentment, the poem retains a daunting energy even though little comes of the frames it puts in place. The ‘reverend man’ never says anything in response to the maid’s story. Technically speaking, the voice of the maid remains framed by the ‘I’ who reports her complaint, but that ‘I’ never explicitly reappears. As a result, the ‘I’ effectively reverts to the subordinate position of ‘attending’ a double voice in the first stanza, and readers are left only with the maid’s final, peculiar sentiments:

‘O, that infected moisture of his eye,
O, that false fire which in his cheek so glowed,
O, that forced thunder from his heart did fly,
O, that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed,
O, all that borrowed motion, seeming owed,
Would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,
And new pervert a reconcilèd maid.’ (323–9)

Katherine Duncan-Jones remarks that in this passage ‘[w]hat initially seems to be a succession of disjointed exclamations turns out to assemble, rather as the love-gifts to the young man were assembled, a collective rhetoric which betrays the maid even as she reinvokes it in her attempt at self-purgation.’¹² Like the tearing-up of the letters and sonnets with which the narrative of the maid begins, here the maid’s lament, virtually blazoning the young man, enacts her own defilement. The last line, ‘And new pervert a reconcilèd maid’, makes explicit what has been implicit all along. She can be ‘betrayed’ because she is ‘fore-betrayed’, perverted because she is ‘reconcilèd’. Itemizing the young man’s qualities expresses the discontent of the maid herself. But like so many other

¹¹ Thomas Roche, *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 445.

¹² *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 452.

blazons, it also expresses the power of the maid, the autonomy loitering in the lattice of her plaited hive. Like the 'T' that frames the poem, the maid herself is subordinated to the young man's 'double voice'. Yet she is, after all, a 'fickle maid', and that doubleness itself also becomes the basis of her elusive social position.

II.

I want in this section to try to give a historically specific account of this elusive social position. How does the curious power of the fickle maid's voice emerge? 'And new pervert a reconciled maid' is a line as hard to parse as it is impossible to ignore. Why does the process by which meaning seems undermined and deferred—the poem's fickleness, its discontent, here its 'perversion'—seem, at the same moment, to manifest such a haunting 'reconciled' presence? For what is unsettling about the poem, I have been arguing, is not simply that it seems constantly to fall apart (which is characteristic of the genre), but that this deconstructive energy also creates powerful voices.

One plausible answer to this question is that the maid voices the emerging power of a middle class, and that what begins to crumble here is aristocratic hegemony. This is in part the argument that Richard Helgerson makes in his consideration of complaint poems (though not *A Lover's Complaint*) in *Adulterous Alliances*. In the gap between male narrator and female speaker, Helgerson locates an origin of the 'bourgeois or domestic tragedy' of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I think Helgerson is right to connect these poems to later bourgeois domestic dramas. In *A Lover's Complaint*, however, oppositions of class, like oppositions of gender, are too unstable to be described as 'a commoner's history set against . . . royal history.'¹³ Just as the opposition male narrator/female speaker continually deconstructs, so too does the opposition between

¹³ Richard Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 38. Other recent accounts of the emergence of a domestic sphere likewise tend to see the domestic as emerging in opposition to aristocratic patriarchalism. See Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994); and Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

framing lord and ‘attending’ servant. The (from our retrospective point of view) forward-looking historical momentum of these works emerges not from a self-consciously oppositional social vanguard (a commoner’s history) but from a generic form that looks longingly back into history. Rather than validating its own emotional charge against aristocratic norms, the poem turns to the increasingly anachronistic language of feudal property for comfort.

This turn does not mean, however, that the poem actually finds comfort in feudal property relations. Nor does it mean that we as readers should turn (as so much older Marxist criticism has) to economics to comfort our own confusion. Instead, let me turn briefly to a recent influential interpretation of Marx’s *Capital* in order to explicate this odd turn in the poem. As Thomas Keenan points out, *Capital* too begins with an echo. At the moment when Marx begins to define commodities, the first sentence of the first section of the first volume, he oddly decides to quote himself: ‘[t]he wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities,” its unit being a single commodity.’¹⁴ ‘[A]n immense accumulation of commodities’ is a quotation from Marx’s ‘Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie’, first published in 1859, which in turn directs readers to Aristotle’s *Politics*. Rather than grounding his analysis of commodities in his earlier work, the quotation, suggests Keenan, is the argument, an embodiment and setting out of the process of commodification that is the subject of analysis:

The matter at issue is the appearance or self-announcement of something *as* something else, the rhetorical structure of simile or metaphor (*als; comme*): semblance, shine, simulation, or dissimulation. In societies where the capitalist mode of production prevails, something (economic) shows itself by hiding itself, by announcing itself as something else or in another form.

This metaphoric turn is crucial for Marx because it is the process of abstracting things—seeing them as something else—which provides an answer to the ‘structuring question’ of Marx’s book: in Keenan’s words, ‘[h]ow can things that do not have the stability to define themselves as things . . . that differ as much within themselves as between themselves, be submitted to the rule of a

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 302–3. All further citations of Marx refer to this text with page numbers indicated parenthetically.

common system of measurement?'¹⁵ The way things get compared and valued in capitalism, argues Marx, is by abstracting them into that enigmatic entity called a commodity. The analysis of commodities, the starting-point that Marx sees as the key to unlocking the secret operation of an economic system, is itself a moment of abstraction, the ghostly emergence of 'something as something else'. This process of abstraction, of commodification, distinguishes capitalism as a mode of production from feudalism, which comprehends value differently (more about this in a moment).

In *A Lover's Complaint*, value comes, so to speak, from the process of abstraction, from the echoes, repetitions, and deferrals in which 'something . . . shows itself by hiding itself, by announcing itself as something else or in another form'. The fickle maid is, and is not, the 'I' who speaks, and vice versa. This process is set in motion not by a forward-looking consciousness but by a backward-looking economic nostalgia. When, for instance, the fickle maid tries to describe what she was like before her seduction by the young man, she imagines her past wholeness as a 'fee-simple':

My woeful self, that did in freedom stand,
And was my own fee-simple, not in part—
What with his art in youth, and youth in art—
Threw my affections in his charmèd power,
Reserved the stalk and gave him all my flower. (143–7)

Such a use of fee-simple is not unprecedented. In Chaucer's 'General Prologue', the term is used to describe the Man of Law: 'Al was fee symple to hym in effect' ('General Prologue', 319).¹⁶ More strikingly, Chaucer's Criseyde, in the midst of her 'plite' (*Troilus and Criseyde* 2:697) over Troilus, describes herself similarly as a property relation:

'I am myn owene womman, wel at ese—
I thank it God—as after myn estat,
Right yong, and stonde unteyd in lusty leese[.]
(*Troilus and Criseyde* 2:750–2)

¹⁵ Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997), 104, 109.

¹⁶ Citations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson et al., 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). On 'fee-symple' and the Man of Law, see Richard Firth Green, 'Chaucer's Man of Law and Collusive Recovery', *Notes and Queries* ns 40:3 (1993), 303–5.

What differentiates the fickle maid from Criseyde, the early modern from the medieval, is less qualitative than quantitative, a matter of the intensity of the pursuit of metaphor than a completely different construction. The fickle maid's retrospective lamentation, unlike Criseyde's present tense, signals a concentration of effect that veers in Shakespeare's poem into a historical difference. The fickle maid remembers that she once 'did in freedom stand', and she imagines this freedom in terms of control of land: she was her 'own fee-simple, not in part'. Why does the fickle maid describe herself with a term from feudal land law? The initial answer would seem to be that feudal law promises a security that the maid feels she lacks, a moment in the past when she 'did in freedom stand'.

When we pursue the implications of the term 'fee-simple' a bit, however, what appears is not a wholeness or pre-seduction moment of true 'freedom'—economic or ontological—but a further moment of abstraction. Like Marx's quotation of himself, the effect of the poem's echoes of land law is not a metaphysical grounding of meaning but a setting in motion of a process of evaluation. Following the OED, fee-simple is usually glossed by editors of the poem as something like 'absolute possession', a rendering that is, I think, a bit misleading. A fee-simple was a specific type of 'fee', a primary unit of feudal property tenure that named the holding of a tenant. In exchange for the holding, the tenant paid homage and service to a lord. A 'fee-simple' was distinct from a general 'fee' because it indicated that the fee was heritable or alienable—that is, you could leave it to your son or give it away to, say, the Church, rather than having it revert to the lord when you died. The concept was important because, as many scholars of property have stressed, the central understanding of feudal tenure was not 'ownership' but 'seisin'. As D. Vance Smith remarks,

Possession, in medieval England, was a matter of some anxiety. Nobody could be entirely certain of the way in which they possessed things, and to what degree they possessed them. One could possess land, for instance, but not be 'seised' of it; one could possess it in fee simple or fee tail; one's possession of it could be measured in remainder or reversion; or the quantum of possession could be measured in the time that it would be held by one's heirs. In the English Middle Ages, it is often difficult to know how, or whether, you actually possess your own household. Possession, the actual usufruct or 'enjoyment' of land, was only one species of the genus seisin, a term

used for various kinds of ownership or the right to own. 'Property' as a legal concept did not really exist, at least as a notion that allowed one to tell the difference between ownership and use.¹⁷

A fee-simple meant that the holder had a great deal of control over the fee, but this control was not, legally or culturally, the same as modern understandings of 'absolute possession'. Glossing fee-simple as absolute possession, I think, sidesteps the term's feudal reverberations. Only the monarch technically had anything like absolute possession (and even monarchs did not really own anything), and the maid is certainly not—at least in any simple sense—claiming to be a monarch. By describing herself as a fee-simple, the maid recalls this network of tenure relations, claiming not 'ownership' of herself but (technically anyway) that she is 'seised *in demesne*' of herself.¹⁸ The rights of a fee-simple mean that she has the ability to leave herself to heirs or alienate herself, even though this would mean that her lord would still have rights in the land—that is, in herself.

Something has clearly changed, though, for in the poem I don't think the maid means only that she is seised in demesne of herself. The most obvious thing that has changed is that fee-simple has become metaphoric and abstracted. The term's contemporary social power emerges as a result of the invocation of a feudal term to understand something else, something that does in fact start to sound a lot like a more modern understanding of absolute possession. Out of this process of abstracting feudal terms, a modern conception of absolute possession begins to emerge. In a now well-documented process, over the course of the seventeenth century a new conception of property emerges and finds something like a culmination in Locke's *Second Treatise*.¹⁹ Reading *A Lover's Complaint* helps to describe how this shift came about. By claiming to control

¹⁷ D. Vance Smith, *Arts of Possession: The Middle English Household Imaginary* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19. Smith draws especially on Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*.

¹⁸ See A. W. B. Simpson, *An Introduction to the History of the Land Law* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), who adds that medieval 'lawyers never adopted the premise that the King owned all the land; such a dogma is of a very modern appearance. It was sufficient for them to note that the King was lord, ultimately, of all the tenants in the realm, and that as lord he had many rights common to other lords (e.g., rights to escheats) and some peculiar to his position as supreme lord (e.g., rights to forfeitures). Naturally they catalogued these special rights, but they did not so differ in kind as to make it necessary to put the King in an entirely separate category; he was supreme lord, and that was enough' (44–5).

¹⁹ See for instance G. E. Aylmer, 'The Meaning and Definition of "Property" in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present* 86 (1980), 87–97.

herself as a feudal fee-simple, the fickle maid paradoxically helps to generate a new form of 'self-possession', that sense of individuality that C. B. Macpherson famously termed 'possessive individualism': an individual who is 'essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them',²⁰ what Christopher Kendrick, drawing on Macpherson, terms 'sovereignty'.²¹ By imagining herself as her 'own fee-simple', the maid instrumentalizes her body while creating herself as a political subject apart from her body-as-economic-property; she maintains sovereignty over herself as if she were a monarch ruling her own land. However, instead of literally controlling her body itself, fee-simple here is a metaphor. The fickle maid abstracts herself from any real property relations and understands herself as this abstraction: a fictive fee-simple. The counter-intuitive part of this process is that her social power emerges as a result of the abstraction. In the discontent of the poem, only when she imagines herself abstractly—most obviously in the metaphor of the fee-simple—does the fickle maid have any power at all. She becomes, as a result of the process of abstraction, like a sovereign—that is, like the feudal monarch who, technically, is the only person in feudalism that maintains absolute possession. Rather than signaling a retrospective moment when she *used* to have social power ('I was my own fee-simple back in the good old days'), it is the abstraction of herself *as* this textual fee-simple which gives the maid power in the 'now' of the poem—at the very moment that she utters these lines.

The paradoxical logic of this process of coming-into-being has its roots in Hegel's account of consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Marx famously applies this understanding to the operation of commodification—particularly in the first chapter of *Capital*. As Gayatri Spivak argues, understanding commodification means understanding 'the role of the abstract'. Against the grain of much Marxist thought, Spivak insists that there is nothing necessarily evil about abstraction of the 'value form'.²² Marx's understanding of the process of abstraction, she suggests, deconstructs 'the use(-value)/exchange(-value)

²⁰ C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), 3.

²¹ Christopher Kendrick, *Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form* (London: Methuen, 1986), 61–2.

²² Some scholars vehemently disagree with this proposition. See Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Žižek, and Others* (New York: Verso, 2003); and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (New York: Verso, 1986).

binary opposition . . . that still haunts our common sense' and makes possible notions of a 'real' foundation of value.²³ What Spivak is getting at here is the notion that exchange value is the abstracted, and consequently bad, version of use value. In this argument, capitalism is evil because it takes use value—the real, tangible base of things, the real value—and turns it into exchange value—the fake, shimmering, misleading fantasy of value. The name of the key use value in such arguments is 'labor'. Labor is seen as the true origin of value, the real thing. Spivak deconstructs this opposition (or claims Marx deconstructs it) by showing that 'our common sense' generally endorses one side: use value and labor are real; exchange value is fake and misleading. What Spivak and others point out, however, is that for Marx the source of 'value' in capitalism is not labor per se but 'labor power', abstracted labor: 'Capital consumes by measure. This is labor-power, not labor. It is the use of the use-value of labor, not the use of labor.'²⁴ The point, then, is that if exchange value is abstracted labor power, so is use value. Use value or labor is not concrete and exchange value abstract—they are all abstract, and they must be in order for capitalism to function at all.

Spivak's knotty argument has important implications for rethinking the relations between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For what is one name of the imaginary location where value seems not abstracted, where the fickle maid purportedly maintains an un-metaphoric sense of self? Feudalism—that moment in the past when she was simply a fee-simple. As A. C. Spearing remarks at the start of *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, '[i]t was the Renaissance that invented the Middle Ages.'²⁵ The invocation of the Middle Ages and feudalism signals a definite social ideologeme for the Renaissance. Feudalism after commodification comes to name all the things that drive contemporary medievalists crazy: a self in touch with the world, no alienation, and perhaps—this is the logical extension of the argument—no subjectivity whatsoever. As every good medievalist knows, such descriptions say nothing about life in, say, the twelfth or thirteenth or fourteenth century. Nor do they

²³ Gayatri Spivak, 'From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What's Left of Theory?', in *What's Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, ed. Judith Butler, John Guillory, and Kendall Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–39, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 2.

²⁵ A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 1.

say anything about feudal property relations, for the most casual glance into feudal land law reveals that it is staggeringly complex and nothing like the simple network of dependent relations it is routinely and cartoonishly made out to be. In other words, feudalism, and the medieval generally, come to name an object of desire for Renaissance subjects: a real source of value—unalienated labor—free from the evils of abstraction.

This nostalgic logic continues to inform, however, even revisionist constructions of the relation between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. If readers since the Renaissance have sought in feudalism a stable source of value, postmodern readers likewise see what they desire in the medieval or premodern (the word 'feudalism' having been effectively banished).²⁶ In place of a secure identity, the Middle Ages is increasingly constructed as a postmodern fantasy of heterogeneity, multi-ethnic identities, and pluralism. James Simpson's recent *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, for example, simply inverts the old transition narrative: 'the institutional simplifications and centralizations of the sixteenth century provoked correlative simplifications and narrowings in literature. If literary history and criticism is . . . ancillary to the complex history of freedoms, then this is a narrative of diminishing liberties.'²⁷ Spivak's understanding of abstraction, I suggest, helps us to avoid such nostalgia, whether modern or postmodern. We should understand such constructions of the 'Middle Ages' or 'feudalism' as the effects of the particular process of abstraction we see gaining momentum in the Renaissance in poems like *A Lover's Complaint* and continuing in our own era. When feudal terms like fee-simple increasingly become names of true, un-abstracted sources of value—or, more recently, as a non-object identity—this notion should be seen as a symptom of commodified abstraction. Nostalgia for a real source of value, or a real grounding of a personality, or a heterogeneous identity, are all effects of commodification. As Susan Reynolds argues, '[w]e cannot understand medieval society and its property relations if we see it through seventeenth- or eighteenth-century spectacles.'²⁸ At the same time, Spivak's argument suggests that it is not possible to take those spectacles completely off. To imagine that the fickle maid once maintained absolute possession, that she loses this possession when the young

²⁶ See the sharp critique of feudalism in Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*.

²⁷ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, vol. ii: *The Oxford English Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 1.

²⁸ Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, 3.

man seduces her, and that she ought to go looking for her self not in abstract metaphors but in something real (property, ethnicity, identity generally) is to operate, completely, within the logic of commodification.

Because of its formal discontent—its abstractions—*A Lover's Complaint* is not a narrative of a self-possession that is lost, a complaint about the loss of a former wholeness, but a coming-into-being of a new form of social power: commodification. Abstraction makes things in this poem: as we saw at the start, the process of structuring and deconstructing—the entire elaborate process of who is (or isn't) speaking—generates the world of the poem. Love complaint itself, in short, becomes productive; it actively helps to create, rather than merely reflect, the social world in which it exists. Instead of a passive victim of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the fickle maid, and the poem generally, are the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Rather than looking for signs of capitalism—wage workers, the accumulation of capital—we must understand, as Brenner insists, the logic that creates such things.

This transition is, like the maid and like the poem, fickle. Its distribution of social power is changeable and more than a little treacherous. At the same moment that the maid's reconciled authority comes into existence, so too does a new form of social inequality. Consider the account of the youth's previous sexual triumphs over other maids. He seduces these maids by reflecting back to them their own desires for, among other things, land ownership. The object which the maids desire in the youth is—in the poem's typically contorted logic—land which they wish to 'bestow' but which they don't actually possess:

'Many there were that did his picture get
 To serve their eyes, and in it put their mind,
 Like fools, that in th'imagination set
 The goodly objects which abroad they find
 Of lands and mansions, theirs in thought assigned,
 And labouring in more pleasures to bestow them
 Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them.
 'So many have, that never touched his hand,
 Sweetly supposed them mistress of his heart.

(134–42)

The maids objectify their own desires in the youth's picture (they 'in it put their mind'), and this objectification is rapidly figured as commodification: they objectify their 'imagination' in 'goodly objects'—commodities, part

of the traffic that comes to characterize early modern England and Europe generally. These commodities are unusual, however, since they are not pepper or cloth or books—the usual stuff scholars point to as part of the new economic world of Renaissance Europe.²⁹ Instead, the commodities the maids foolishly want are administered and bequeathed manors.³⁰ Whereas ‘goodly objects’ signal the shifting, if not groundless, world of commerce, ‘lands and mansions’ appear valuable because they remain, at least hypothetically, free from the vicissitudes of commodification, a piece of feudal stability in an increasingly commodified world. For the maids, control of a mansion signals their control of themselves. The mansions are the outward signs of the maid’s interior authority, and they are also, more pragmatically, the source of the rent-income which makes it possible for someone to live, eat, and buy goodly objects. Bestowing the lands and mansions consequently posits the subjective stability the maids don’t have, the paradise they think they see in the young man. For these maids, possessing lands and mansions signals a socially stabilized self apart from the demands of mercantile traffic, a source of true value, so to speak. What the maids want in the picture, finally, is a secure identity that relieves their desire and makes them stable, and this is exactly what bestowing land promises to do.

The problem is that these lands and mansions are not a stable grounding of personality but are commodities that they find ‘abroad’. ‘Abroad’ here means, in one sense, ‘broadly, widely’—there are lots of lands and mansions about. But ‘abroad’ also signals a contradiction in the desire of the maids. For what the maids desire in these lands and mansions is a sort of conceptual home; but this home turns out to be ‘abroad’, or (as the OED puts it in another possible meaning) ‘out of one’s house’. As Lena Cowen Orlin remarks, the idea of the house in the period is ‘restless, conflicted, shape-shifting, imperfectly defended and unsusceptible of repose’.³¹ These mansions are literally home and un-home, *heimlich* and *unheimlich* or, in the more usual translation of the German terms, uncanny.³² Because these domestic mansions are abroad, they

²⁹ See Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

³⁰ Kerrigan, *The Sonnets and A Lover’s Complaint*, suggests that bestow means ‘dispose and administer’; certainly the sense of bestow as ‘to settle or give in marriage’ (OED 4) suggests a sense of bequeathing property.

³¹ Orlin, *Private Matters*, 269.

³² On the uncanny household, see Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 18–28. On domesticity and nationalism, see Wall, *Staging Domesticity* and Helgersen, *Adulterous Alliances*.

lie between a nascent English nationalism, an international market, and feudal custom. Rather than a grounding of personality, the mansions offer a specter of such security, a social stability that is *unheimlich*: foreign and home, domestic and aristocratic, feudal and capitalist, possessed and dispossessed.

The poem cannot leave this imaginary land alone, and it places the desire of the maids more explicitly into a general historical shift: 'And labouring in more pleasures to bestow them | Than the true gouty landlord which doth owe them.' The libidinal excitement of 'labouring in more pleasures' is compared to the efforts of the 'true gouty landlord' to bequeath his lands and mansions. If 'gouty' implies a bit of urgency for this feeble landlord to write a will, it also evokes the frailty of the conceptual interrelation of a stable sense of social position with heritable property. What is gouty here isn't merely a single landlord but an entire system of patriarchal property relations. In the course of the description, landed estates are idealized as outside the market and then quickly weakened in the figure of the desperate, gouty landlord. Feudal land, which seems initially to be a traditional and stable antidote to the shifty newfangledness of imported commodities, turns out, as an abstracted ideal, to help to create a market of commodities. The imaginary stability of bestowing turns 'lands and mansions' into goodly objects, not an extension of patrimony—a disruption heightened by the fact that it is feminine 'maids' here who are interrupting the patrimony of primogeniture through their imaginative desire for commodities.³³

For the fickle maid, such nostalgic longing is simply 'foolish': the maids imagine that a disappearing system of property relations is stable; they mistake their fetishization for something genuine; they suppose that there is a real origin of value. Rather than recognize the power that accrues to them through their ability to objectify lands and mansions, these maids think that the lands and mansions are real and that they actually possess them (and, in course, the young man) in a feudal way. In their effort to reinforce a purely imaginary understanding of feudal property relations and a stable sense of self, the maids help to generate a commodified logic that displaces such feudal property rights and, quite literally, seduces them. They help make the market that subordinates them.

³³ See Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), who suggests that women such as Anne Wentworth 'codified' notions of 'abstract possessive individualism for the very purposes of rejecting the claim that she was her husband's sexual property' (31).

Unlike the maids, the youth mostly benefits from discontentment, but his success is not simply a result of either his sexuality (he seduces men too: 'he did in the general bosom reign | Of young, of old, and sexes both enchanted' (127–8)) or his social position. What is different about the young man, rather, is that he is more abstract than any other character in the poem. If the maid's voice appears double—an echo from a sistering vale, both her own and the narrator's—the youth's voice is tripled: the fickle maid speaks him as well. Likewise, his hegemony and successful seductions do not emerge out of his use of force or violence or any clearly demarcated institutional authority (he is not a princely rapist, for instance). Instead, his victories, like capital's, appear through a nearly invisible and irresistible logic. When he first begins to seduce the fickle maid, he depicts himself as quasi-feudal lord, controlling like vassals all the hearts he has conquered. Before he met the fickle maid, he claims his heart was "free, | And reigned commanding in his monarchy" (195–6), a retrospective fiction not unlike the fickle maid's imagination of herself as a sovereign fee-simple. When the fickle maid gains control of his heart, he becomes a vassal himself, an argument he extends, with shocking brilliance, to his previous loves. They, in technical feudal fashion, remain his vassals, and the love-tokens he has given to the fickle maid are, in fact, their 'tributes' (197) to him. Indeed, seeing their lord in agony to another lord, all the hearts he has previously conquered cry out to the fickle maid who (apparently) is breaking the young man's heart:

"Now all these hearts that do on mine depend,
 Feeling it break, with bleeding groans they pine,
 And suppliant their sighs to you extend
 To leave the batt'ry that you make 'gainst mine,
 Lending soft audience to my sweet design,
 And credent soul to that strong-bonded oath
 That shall prefer and undertake my troth." []

(274–80)

The young man's 'troth', of course, will not last when love pricks him again. The oath and 'troth' stand as seductive, imaginary moments, and his recourse to them reminds us that the young man too is in love and subject to its 'potential' (264).

I do not think that we can describe this process as a self-conscious one: that the young man is a manipulative oppressor, or that the maids are dupes with

false consciousness.³⁴ The young man does not stand somehow apart from the poem's discontent, fully conscious of historical change; he too, after all, is fickle by his own admission. Instead, he seems less like a fully self-conscious individual, plotting the downfall of men and women everywhere, than a sort of compulsive (almost Spenserian) embodied practice.³⁵ Likewise, the fickle maid can diagnose these processes as foolish, but when she describes herself as a fee-simple she buys into (so to speak) an imaginary value no amount of self-consciousness seems capable of resisting. She becomes as foolish as the other maids she scoffs at. Neither she, nor the young man, nor certainly the other maids, are ever free from the poem's discontent. As the young man puts it,

["O most potential love! vow, bond, nor space,
In thee hath neither sting, knot, nor confine,
For thou art all, and all things else are thine."] (264–6)

Amor vincit omnia. Love is discontent, and everyone and everything are subject to it. Love and discontent are the poem's vocabulary for what we would call, after Marx, commodification—a process no one single person can control, to which all are subject, and which is certainly not equitable.

Love, Shakespeare writes in *Venus and Adonis*, is 'Ne'er settled equally, but high or low.'³⁶ The young man of *A Lover's Complaint* is currently 'high', and the maids 'low', but there seems to be no guarantee that things will always turn out that way. Consider the youth's social position. The history of the genre of the complaint makes it reasonable to assume that the young man is noble or a courtier. As Kerrigan remarks, it is 'difficult not to conclude that Shakespeare's poem is a version of *pastourelle*, with the "fickle maid" a country girl seduced by a more sophisticated, perhaps courtly, suitor.'³⁷ Something like that is the case in Daniel's *The Complaint of Rosamond*. But *A Lover's Complaint* never makes

³⁴ See Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1995): '[l]et us reiterate that Marx did not produce a theory of "class consciousness" here, in the sense of a system of ideas which might be said, consciously or otherwise, to express the "aims" of a particular class. He produced, rather, a theory of the class character of consciousness' (47–8).

³⁵ The question of the poem's relation to Spenser has a long critical history. See Vickers, *Shakespeare, A Lover's Complaint, and John Davies of Hereford*, 47–75.

³⁶ William Shakespeare, 'Venus and Adonis', in *Narrative Poems*, ed. Jonathan Crewe (New York: Penguin, 1999), 46.

³⁷ Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, 14.

such social standing explicit. Instead, the youth's social position emerges not from a blood title, or from a landed estate, but from the way his horse acts: "That horse his mettle from his rider takes; | Proud of subjection, noble by the sway" (107–8). The horse becomes noble by accepting its subordination to the youth, and this in turn tacitly signals the youth's nobility. The youth consequently seems vaguely aristocratic and not some bumpkin, but crucially only by implication. His noble value is realized only via his horse; nobility only emerges, to paraphrase Hegel, as it is recognized by another. We might then say that his nobility functions in the abstract as a masculine feudal lord, as a noble, rather than literally being a feudal lord in the sense of controlling a demesne of land. Here is the birth of a new conception of a transcendent nobility whose ties to property become abstractions, not necessarily real property, and whose hegemony lies rather in its control of capital. 'Noble' is less a noun indicating the being of the young man than it is an adverb which describes how he acts.

And so we return to the maid and her contradictory final declaration, caught awkwardly between a purely imaginary (and foolish) sense of herself as feudal property and a commodified process of abstraction that gives her social power. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the maid is *fickle*. If her adherence to a feudal imaginary results in her seduction, her discontented capacity to abstract herself is the means by which her social power emerges. Ripping up sonnets and letters certainly indicates the maid's feminine subordination to the masculine youth, but it also expresses the very real social agency of her capacity for abstraction: 'And new pervert a reconcilèd maid'. I can't imagine anyone reading this final line without wincing a bit. It's a bitter pill—the maid's perversion by the youth, his ability, or love's ability, to get her to believe in a stable value ('reconcilèd') means she will once again be seduced. Abstraction brings with it subordination and oppression. But it also brings with it a fluid social capital. This capital is certainly not equally or fairly distributed: the point of the entire poem, I take it, is that this transaction creates a fierce social conflict that I would prefer to call 'class struggle'. Made into a commodity, the maid becomes subordinated, subjected, and oppressed, and much of the power of the poem comes from her outrage. Yet such abstraction is, simultaneously, the generator of her voice, and she does like that. 'And new pervert a reconcilèd maid' consequently sounds to me not like resignation but like struggle—the *complaint* that emerges in a new, abstract, transitory social world. The bittersweet paradox of *A Lover's Complaint* will be that while love has

conquered her, it has also given her a voice. 'Who, young and simple, would not be so loved?' (320), she asks. 'Loved' means that she has been loved and seduced, but it also means that she has been turned into a lover, and a commodity, herself—and who could resist that sort of agony and agency?

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2

Shakespeare's Resurrections

Sarah Beckwith

Grace is forgiveness.

—Karl Barth

Grace, inasmuch as it is given gratuitously, excludes the notion of debt.

—Thomas Aquinas

You pay a great deal too dear for what's
given freely.

—*The Winter's Tale* (1.1.17–18)

The Grace of Christ, or the holie Ghost by him geven dothe take awaie
the stonie harte, and geveth an harte of fleshe.

—Article X of 42 Articles

Introduction

Let's forget about the ghosts that have troubled Shakespearean theater in recent years. Let's for the moment lay to rest Clarence, the ghost of Hamlet's father, and other haunted and haunting spirits.¹ Such ghosts are conjured in *The Winter's Tale*, the subject of my essay, but though they lend the play their

¹ For recent attention to Shakespeare's ghosts especially as they relate to a purgatory now discarded as an empty fable, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001).

title, they are not finally its subject or its medium. Hermione's ghost is twice conjured in the play. When she appears to Antigonus to grant Perdita her name, she is strictly provisional, for Antigonus has 'heard, but not believed, the spirits o'th' dead | May walk again' (3.3.16–17). 'If such thing be', Hermione's appeared in a dream more like waking than sleep; in his report she melts into the air with shrieks after delivering her message.² She is stage-conjured once again by Leontes as he imagines the response of Hermione's ghost to the prospect of his re-marriage: her sainted spirit would 'again possess her corpse, and on this stage | Where we offenders mourn, appear soul-vexed | And begin, "Why to me?"' (5.1.58–60). Why have you done this to me? And Paulina joins the conceit: were she the ghost, she would shriek, 'Remember mine' (5.1.67). But the play, even—perhaps especially—in such conscious echoings of *Hamlet*, refuses such hauntings, or rather they function as pure memorials, tokens to chastise the guilty soul, and not as realized spirits.³ The ghost story whispered to Hermione by Mamillius is private, interrupted, and finally superceded by Leontes' Lenten penitence and the public rite of participation in the 'awakening' of Hermione, which is also the awakening to faith in all gathered around her, a ceremony that brooks no recusance. *The Winter's Tale*, I want to argue, consciously replaces the memory-theater of the ghost world with the memory-theater of a new theatrico-religious paradigm of resurrection. If Shakespearean ghosts have been concerned with forgettings, the new paradigm articulated in *The Winter's Tale* is concerned with recollection re-imagined through the paradigm of repentance and resurrection.

Shakespeare's resurrection theater is intimately linked to an exploration of both penitence and repentance as modes of recollection and redemption mediated through a profound and resonant engagement with the puzzling, concertedly bewildering resurrection narratives of forgiveness in the Gospels, the Easter liturgy, and the mystery cycles. The resurrection narratives are, after all, paradigmatic texts for the exploration of recognition.⁴ In this

² It is important that though he thinks that 'dreams are toys' he will accede 'superstitiously' to this 'appearance' of Hermione (3.3.39, 40).

³ I don't have time in this essay to pursue the Shakespearean 'resurrections' of the late plays as conscious re-workings of the earlier spectres here, but for a beginning see Richard Kearney's helpful recent assessment of readings of Hamlet's ghost, 'Spectres of *Hamlet*', in *Spiritual Shakespeares*, ed. Ewan Fernie (London: Routledge, 2005), 157–85.

⁴ This is beautifully explored by Piero Boitani in 'To Recognize Is a God: Helen, Mary Magdalene, Marina-Menuchim', in *The Bible and Its Rewritings* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 130–81. And see below.

memory-theater it is recognition and acknowledgment that become central. And it is key that in this new paradigm in which response, responsiveness, and responsibility are all important, the returning figures are *actual*—flesh and blood. What the play offers us instead of ghost stories is the most spectacular in a series of instances in which those supposed dead appear precisely to those who have harmed them. Such characters are not in fact dead at all, but they are specifically dead, indeed metaphorically killed by those to whom they appear.

Return and Recollection

Consider the following dramatis personae, all presumed dead during the course of the plays they feature in:

- Claudio in *Measure for Measure*
- Helena in *All's Well that Ends Well*
- Marina to *Pericles*
- Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*
- Imogen in *Cymbeline*
- Prospero to Gonzales, Alonso, and Sebastian in *The Tempest*.

The drama of their return is always a theatre of memory and recognition. The ‘resurrected’ characters burst into the present as reminders of an ineradicable past that must be confronted in the lives and thoughts—in the self-recognition—of those to whom they so hauntingly return. The intensity of their return is particularly felt by, and I would argue, particularly directed toward, those figures most profoundly implicated in their disappearance.

When Claudio re-appears after his reprieve from execution, his sister must greet him as the woman whose last words wished that execution swifter.⁵ When Helena enters the court, the question of the specter is raised once again by the king: ‘Is’t real that I see?’ (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 5.3.306). Bertram’s response, uttered we presume to Helena, is at once a claiming of her as shadow and substance, as name and thing of wife, and almost in the same instance an

⁵ ‘Thy sin’s not accidental, but a trade. | Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd. | ’Tis best that thou diest quickly’ (*Measure for Measure* 3.1.148–50).

'O, pardon!' (5.3.308).⁶ Her unanticipated re-appearance jolts him back to a past in which he has dispossessed her, a past he imagined was his alone to recount. Hero, after a falsely reported 'death' and full funeral rites, returns to the man who has brutally and publicly defamed her on her wedding day as his once and future bride;⁷ and Imogen returns to the man who has, so he thinks, arranged for her murder. Marina's return to Pericles is differently understood and the power of the great recognition scene in *Pericles* lies in the discovery that they share the same story, as they share the same flesh and blood. But this discovery might never be made were they not to come to speech, an act full of massive risk and painful recollection for both of them. Posthumous' encounter with Imogen in the last scene of *Cymbeline* demonstrates how little recognition has to do with sight. He fails utterly to recognize her even though she stands right in front of him protesting her name. Prospero stands outside of the charmed circle in which Alonso and Sebastian are immobilized; this encounter with the man they must have thought was long ago drowned fails to bring the unrepentant Sebastian to penitent recognition. But it brings Prospero to take on his humanity in one of the most meta-theatrical renderings of theater as a memory palace, a place of redeemed memory and the possibilities, difficulties, and promises of reconciliation.

The returns in such resurrections, unlike the ghostly returns of earlier plays, offer the opportunity for transformation, but a transformation that will take up and redeem the past.⁸ So they offer too, the opportunity for a new accounting in which the *responsibility* of the one who has caused harm is utterly bound up with the *response* to the person harmed. It is because such re-appearances involve the most complex encounters with the past of those to whom they re-appear that I call these re-appearances resurrections. They utterly and completely violate the fantasies in their minds that the past is subject to their will, their possession. The resurrected subject once thought dead is the vehicle for the resurrection of the one whose actions had appeared to lead to

⁶ 'No, my good lord, | 'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see, | The name and not the thing' (*All's Well* 5.3.306–8).

⁷ Lines 5.4.65–6 best encapsulate the movement from funeral to wedding in *Much Ado About Nothing*: to Don Pedro's amazed response—'the former Hero, Hero that is dead!' Leonato replies: 'She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived,' anticipating Leontes' brutal, petrifying slandering of Hermione.

⁸ It is just these transformations worked through the grace of forgiveness that allow for a future at all, that allow for the possibility that the sinner 'can recognize his victim as his hope' (Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1982)).

an irrevocable harm.⁹ And of course it is just this *mutuality* that differentiates these encounters from the ghostly returns of the unavenged in earlier plays. The mechanism of their putative deaths is nearly always mechanistically contrived—a thing of complicitous friars or of potent drugs capable of inducing a sleep that mimics death, and most outrageously, of statues that appear to come to life. To pursue the whys and wherefores of these means is to dissolve the kinds of trust being re-built in the new communities and identities forged through such returns. Leontes' puzzled inquiry at the end of the play

LEONTES Thou hast found mine,
 But how, is to be question'd; for I saw her
 As I thought, dead and have in vain said many
 A prayer upon her grave. (5.3.138–41)

is parenthetical and belated. It is not how Hermione has survived that is important but *that* she has. Her recovery depends on the renunciation of epistemology as our mode of access to others. For the insistence on knowing others as the very basis of our access to them, as Stanley Cavell and Shakespeare know, will make the others in our lives disappear, petrify them or turn them into nothings. It will cloud the basis of our relations to each other in response and acknowledgment even as it compensates for the sometimes intolerable responsibilities for the maintenance of our relations with each other when they rest on nothing more secure than such responses.¹⁰

⁹ Such resurrections may be the vehicles of mortifying shame, a shame that nevertheless is a reminder of a fundamental connectedness with others. In his chapter on 'Remorse' in *Lost Icon: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), Rowan Williams reflects that remorse, honor, and shame are 'areas of our human experience and discourse' that 'are unintelligible except on the assumption that my past, my publically identifiable history, the story that can be told of me, does not *belong* exclusively to me' (104). The deeply Wittgensteinian reflections in this work on remorse are a guiding influence on this chapter, as are those of Raimond Gaita (see below). For a further meditation on the challenge presented by shame and remorse to the liberal discourse of rights, see W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006), 40, 67.

¹⁰ This is of course the burden of Cavell's brilliant analysis of Leontes as skeptic in his essay 'Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading *The Winter's Tale*', in *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003). Cavell's analysis of Shakespearean tragedy is part of his profound redefinition of skepticism in *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (1979; rpt., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999). See also 'Knowing and Acknowledging' and 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear', in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (1976; rev. ed., Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). I analyse the language of acknowledgment in Cavell's sense in 'The Play of Voice: Acknowledgment, Knowledge, and Self-Knowledge in *Measure for Measure*', in *Spectacle and Public Performance in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Robert E. Stillman (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), 121–44.

It is the resurrection narratives from the Gospels, mediated liturgically in Eucharistic worship and in medieval Corpus Christi theater, that provide the paradigm for these encounters as narratives of forgiveness, of redeemed memory and the possibilities of mutual presencing. In incorporating the deep structure of these narratives, Shakespeare creates a grammar of theater capable of countering both the protestant suspicion of fiction and the kind of papists who would 'grossly palpabriz and feel God with their bodily fingers', in Thomas Nashe's striking phrase.¹¹ Resurrection narratives take us deeply into an understanding and enactment of memory that denies individual possession and ownership. Such a view is not doctrinal; it does not articulate a set of beliefs about the resurrection. That would be far too literalistic a reading. Its truths will exist as story because the condition of faith is in any case a narrative condition. (By this I mean that Christians only know Christian truths by virtue of being transformed by the Christian story.¹²) This new grammar of theater will seek not so much to communicate new ideas as to construct shared possibilities to which the understanding of grace as forgiveness will be central.

Penitence/Repentance

In a characteristically witty turn of phrase, David Steinmetz wrote that the Reformation began almost accidentally as a debate about the word for 'penitence'.¹³ The Reformation preference for the term repentance over penance seeks to replace the Vulgate reading '*penitentiam agite*' with its uncomfortable, even blasphemous works theology. Yet the early reformers were far removed from the antinomian willfulness perceived in them by their opponents who could not conceive of the excess and gratuity, the utter one-sidedness of ref-

¹¹ Nashe is here talking about atheists in *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* in *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works* ed. J. B. Steane (1972; rpt., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 479: 'most of them, because they cannot grossly palpabriz or feel God with their bodily fingers, confidently and grossly discard Him.'

¹² See for example, Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), especially Part 11; William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹³ David Steinmetz, 'Reformation and Grace', in *Grace upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Langford*, ed. Robert K. Johnston, L. Gregory Jones, and Jonathan R. Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999, 75).

ormation grace. The early reformers would have thought that it was precisely those who have progressed in the love of God who could see sin in the first place and understand their own behavior under its sign. As Steinmetz puts the matter: 'It requires some growth in grace in order to repent properly.'¹⁴ Yet, when the remorse, call it contrition, of the sinner becomes detached from the power of the keys, as it threatened to do in medieval contritionist theology, Wycliffite heresy, and the structures and institutions of the post-Reformation settlement, there was no *formal* declaration of forgiveness, no office of forgiveness, no agency authorized to speak God's forgiveness through the Church. In *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker makes the distinction between God's forgiveness and ministerial absolution:

Wherefore having hitherto spoken of the vertue of repentance required, of the discipline of repentance which Christ did establish, and of the Sacrament of Repentance invented sithence, against the pretended force of humane absolution, in sacramental penitencie, lett it suffice thus farre to have shewed, how God alone doth truly give, the vertue of repentance alone procure, and private ministeriall absolution butt declare remission of sinnes.¹⁵

The priest as confessor had exercised the power of the keys in offering absolution as both verdictive and exercitive—in J. L. Austin's terms—as both verdict and sentence.¹⁶ In the absence of that verdictive and exercitive role, the problem of assurance—a medieval as well as a reformation pre-occupation—became increasingly pressing. So having asserted the merely declarative nature of absolution, Hooker continues: 'Now the last and sometymes hardest to bee satisfied by repentance are our mindes.'¹⁷

In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare had explored the project of a political and social reformation of sin, yet the conclusion that 'grace is grace, despite of

¹⁴ Ibid. Steinmetz writes: 'Reformers were convinced that only those who love God hate sin—Thorougly unconverted sinners are perfect children in their knowledge of sin' (83).

¹⁵ Richard Hooker, book six of *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, quoted from *The Folger Library Edition of the works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. Speed Hill et al, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977–98), 3: 97. Book six was not printed until 1648. See P. G Stanwood's introduction to volume three of *The Folger Library Edition* for the complex textual history of this book.

¹⁶ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962; rpt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), 151.

¹⁷ Hooker, *Of the Lawes*, 3: 97. There is of course much more to be said about the rendering of salvation as a question of epistemology but I do not have time to explore it in these brief remarks about the transformation of penance to repentance. This is one of the topics of my investigation in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, a work in progress. There I do a much more detailed analysis of the specific speech acts of confession and absolution and their transformation.

all controversy' is hardly made readily available in that play; indeed that play might be understood to exhaust hope in any such social and political 'solution' (1.2.24–5). *Measure for Measure* might be understood to thematize the exhaustion of extrinsicist conceptions of grace as it does the resources of comedy for Shakespeare. Even if one accepts, as I do not, the Duke's dispensation of pardon as 'grace divine', the play has so concertedly sundered will from intention in the plot that it becomes clear that change is imagined less as a complete transformation than as an external imposition.¹⁸ It is in the late plays *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* that Shakespeare evolves new ways of making manifest the presence and possibility of grace and forgiveness. First I want to explore the presence of these topoi in these late plays, and second, seek to outline why it is the resurrection narratives that provide the paradigm, the deep structure of this theater, and how those narratives inform Shakespeare's sacramental theater.

Is't enough I Am Sorry?

'Is't enough I am sorry?' (5.4.11). As if to confirm Richard Hooker's insight, this is Posthumus' anguished question in *Cymbeline*. 'Sir, you have done enough' is Cleomines' response to Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* (5.1.1). The question of sufficiency haunts penitential discourse as it haunts Shakespeare's last plays. What is enough and for whom? What are the agencies of forgiveness? God? The person wronged? The priest on behalf of the Church? To Cleomines' assertion that he has redeemed his faults, 'paid down | More penitence than done trespass', that he should now 'as the heavens have done, forget your evil | With them, forgive yourself' (5.1.3–4, 5–6), Leontes replies:

LEONTES Whilest I remember
 Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
 My blemishes in them, and so still think of
 The wrong I did myself; which was so much
 That heirless it hath made my kingdom, and

¹⁸ I explore this in 'Medieval Penance, Reformation Repentance and *Measure for Measure*', in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 193–204.

Destroy'd the sweet'st companion that e'er man
 Bred his hopes out of. (5.1.6–12)

Cleomines' confident language of sufficiency is cast in the language of a measurable debt; a debt which once paid permits the forgetting of evil and the forgiving of self. Cleomines is also complacent that heaven's actions in the agency of forgiveness are transparent, fully readable to him, if not to Leontes. But Leontes understands enough about the grammar of forgiveness to know that he cannot forgive himself, that the grammar of forgiving yourself is in fact nonsensical. To forgive himself would entail absolving himself and this would imply that he could by an act of his will reclaim his acts and their effects on others back out of the lives of those others and order them by dint of that will.¹⁹

Forgiving, then, like promising, requires the presence of others; and in the acknowledgment of that mutuality lies the truth that others have reality in a past that is no one's individual possession.²⁰ In remembering Hermione he will remember what his relation to her has been—that is part of the particularity and the hard faithfulness of his memory that he must acknowledge his relation to her. This is what fidelity now is. To know his deed, to paraphrase Macbeth, is to know himself. That is why, as Raimond Gaita has suggested, the natural expression of remorse is 'My God what have I done! How could I have done it?'²¹ For Leontes, his remorse is his path to finding the independent reality of Hermione. It is the way he refinds her. Gaita has described remorse as 'recognition of the reality of another person through the shock of wronging her, just as grief is the recognition of another through the shock of losing her.'²² Leontes' remorse shows the lucidity of his suffering. It shows that the only true remembrance of her will, mortifyingly, involve a remembrance, blasting and perpetual of his own folly in harming her. The causes of the death of Hermione and Mamillius will be marked on their graves, and in visiting them he will constantly be faced with the mark of his own actions. The two memories are coterminous and this is why remorse is a form of proper memory. It is also why it is so radically isolating and lonely in its fearful lucidity. They are brought

¹⁹ Williams, *Lost Icons*, 104.

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; rpt., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 243.

²¹ Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (1991; rpt., London: Routledge, 2004), p. xxi.

²² *Ibid.* 52.

together in the compact grammar of 'Come and lead me | To these sorrows' (3.2.242–3). Lifted out of the mad fantasy that has turned Hermione to stone, for Leontes to know Hermione, is to acknowledge *his* relation with her.

The plays in which these questions are asked and prematurely answered stage their own tentative responses. In *Cymbeline*, the response comes in a bravura recognition/reconciliation scene whose revelations begin their unfolding by virtue of the truths revealed in a deathbed confession, a scene that holds the moving and the ludicrous in exquisite tension in which virtually every single character on stage is restored to him or herself as they also encounter each other. And in *The Winter's Tale* it appears in an astonishing scene in which a statue appears to come to life, a scene in which the agencies of both religion and art are deployed to embody the ravages of time and the possibilities of a reconciled community.

Posthumous' anguished question, expressed in the form of a prayer, exposes his new sense of creatureliness discovered in the very act of repentance; only the gods' forgiveness can give him the 'penitent instrument' that will pick the bolt of his conscience (5.4.10). Posthumous' sense of indebtedness is complete; it pertains to his very life, a life that even if rendered would not restore or repay hers: 'For Imogen's dear life, take mine, and though | 'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life; you coined it' (5.4.22–3). In these late plays the understanding of grace and forgiveness is intimately associated with what it means to be creatures; the costs of the denial of creatureliness in fantasies of autonomy, in denials of dependence, in the creation of others in conformity to our own will, in the negation, therefore, of the condition of createdness, is what the plays must recover from. The discovery of others, of self, and of God is in these plays often part of one and the same movement.

It is central to my understanding of this endeavor that the languages and discourses for thinking about such peace are primarily liturgical. They entail an understanding of the body of Christ as liturgically enacted and not institutionally guaranteed. That is why in medieval practice and penitential theology, the sacrament of the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance are incomprehensible except by means of each other. Indeed the abolition of penance as sacrament and the incorporation of confession into general confession at morning and evening prayer and Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer services might have placed even more emphasis on the Eucharist as the place of reconciliation. For the body of Christ in this understanding, as it is elaborated in some of the most central medieval cultural forms, is precisely

not the wafer held between the hands of the priest, whether understood as the transubstantiated elements of bread and wine or as a memorial enactment of Christ's redemption. It is the reconciled community. The church as reconciled community might be occluded or betrayed, it might cease to become visible just insofar as a peaceable kingdom is lost and its lineaments will be restored where such a peace is glimpsed or embodied in its practices.

This understanding, which sees the church itself as a performance of the body of Christ rather than a possession of it, has certain consequences. To understand some of the depths of the transformation of Renaissance theater we need to see it in the light of the revolution in ritual and performative culture entailed in church and theater together.²³ For the church to perform the body of Christ means that the church itself will become invisible or visible as these bonds of community are made and broken. That is why the discourses and languages of penance and repentance are an intrinsic part of Shakespearean reconciliation and need to be understood in all their complex *longue durée*. It is why, I think, in the creation of a theater that is post-tragic, Shakespeare turns with a renewed intensity to the structures and practices of penitence. If Shakespearean tragedy has been about the consequences of the denial of acknowledgment, then the late romances will find in an exploration of the languages of penitence and repentance an exploration of the possibilities of acknowledgment. For as Arendt has said: 'Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we would never recover.'²⁴ The possibility of redemption from the predicament of irreversibility is the faculty of forgiving.

Resurrection Narratives: I

To understand, in Karl Barth's terms, grace as forgiveness is to understand the deepest implication of the resurrection narratives in an exploration of memory. The resurrection narratives explore the roots of the recognition of Christ and

²³ The imbrication of church and theater, as of the sacraments of penance and Eucharist, especially as they are understood in the 'sacramental theater' of the mystery cycles, is the topic of my book *Signifying God*.

²⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 237.

self-recognition in the painful continuities that the disciples who see Christ as risen must recognize themselves as those who betrayed him. Recognition of Christ is, for them, bound up with a self-recognition that must involve a painful confrontation of the past and its diminutions. In Rowan Williams' moving exploration of the resurrection narratives he explores the way in which God's memory can hold open the past for the apostolic community. To be able to see Christ, for example, Peter must accept his role as denier. He has denied Christ three times as he warms himself before the charcoal fire (John 18.18); in John 21 when the risen Christ is on the shores of Galilee, Peter jumps into the sea to go to him and 'As soone then as they were come to land, they saw hote coales, and fish layd thereon, and bread' (John 21.9).²⁵ Peter is called to recognize the risen Christ in front of the very object by which he had denied him, and he is asked three times if he loves Christ. The reprise of Peter's actions is essential to the granting of his new apostolic identity: there is no new identity without the redemption of that memory of betrayal but it is the presence of Christ that allows such a memory to be borne in the first place. The resurrection stories create forgiven persons.²⁶

Peter's remorse is made a focus of the treatments in some of the resurrection narratives of the mystery cycles. In *The Towneley Plays*, for example, Peter dismisses Mary Magdalen's witness as foolish carping, and Paul joins in with his misogyny here by assimilating I Cor. 15.9–11 to John 20.18–19: 'And it is wretyn in oure law | 'Ther is no trust in womans saw.'²⁷ When he begins to believe Mary he is filled with remorse and his thoughts immediately turn to that moment before the burning coals when he denied Christ: 'I saide I knew not that good | Creature, my master' (87–8). He rehearses the moment of his betrayal. But when Christ comes with his wounds freshly bleeding, Christ's forgiveness of his disciples becomes central to his establishment of their apostolic mission. As he breathes the Holy Ghost into them, he grants them the power to bind and loose sin:

²⁵ *The Bishop's Bible in The New Testament Octapla: Eight English Versions of the New Testament in the Tyndale-King-James Tradition*, ed. Luther A. Weigle (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946). All quotations come from this edition.

²⁶ Williams writes, 'If (the apparitions) were fundamentally experiences of restoring grace, they take their places in a concrete, shared human history of hope, betrayal, violence and guilt, and are evidenced *not* by individual report but by the continuing existence of the community in which this history is caught up and redeemed' (*Resurrection*, 118).

²⁷ *Thomas of India in The Towneley Plays*, ed. Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 1:8, 29–30. All quotations from the play come from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line numbers.

I gif you here pauste:
 Whom in erth ye lowse of syn,
 In heuen lowsyd shall be;
 And whom in erthe ye bynd therin,
 In heuen bonden be he. (237–41)

Their mission to forgive others is indissolubly based on their own forgiveness, so that their past may be faced and not prove annihilating.

In *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, the race to the tomb between Peter and ‘the other disciple’ from Luke 24.12 and John 20.2–10 also prompts Peter’s remorse, now tinged with wonder at the emptiness of the tomb and the discarded shroud which he takes as a sure sign of resurrection. Once again he recalls his betrayal of Christ by the coals and his felt lack of worth and is comforted by John.²⁸ In the meditational play from *E museo 160*, *Christ’s Resurrection*, the fully penitential dimensions are enlarged even further as Peter enters weeping bitterly and confesses his denial ‘with teres of contrition’.²⁹ Here the ecclesiological dimensions are drawn out as he reflects as Peter, first apostle and future pope, on the name given him by Christ: ‘*Petra* is a ston, fulle of stabilittee, | Always stedfaste! Alase! Wherefore was I | Not stabile accordinge to my nam, stedfastlye’ (297–9). The church is founded not in triumphant glory but on the basis of the taking up of just this sinful past. Here, like Leontes remembering Hermione, remembering Jesus is remembering his own cowardice, fear, and lack of fidelity: ‘When it commys to remembrance | In my minde it is euer!’ (327–8).

In *The Towneley Plays* the intertwining of the Eucharistic and penitential is further elucidated by the use of the central text of John 6: ‘I am the bread of life.’ In Towneley’s *Resurrection* play, as the soldiers sleep, Christ emerges from the tomb as angels sing ‘Christus resurgens’ and displaying his bleeding wounds he links the Johanne words to the offering of his body in the mass, a scene usually treated in the ‘Last Supper plays’ in the other cycles:

I grauntt theym here a measse
 In brede, myn awne body.

²⁸ *The Resurrection*, 402 ff, 414–18, in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. i, ed. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974). All quotations come from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line numbers.

²⁹ *Christ’s Resurrection*, in *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E Museo 160*, ed. Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy, and Louis B. Hall Jr. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), 287. All quotations come from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line numbers.

That ilk veray brede of lyfe
 Becommys my fleshe in wordys fyfe:
 Whoso resaues in syn or stryfe
 Bese dede foreuer,
 And whoso it takys in rightwys lyfe
 Dy shall ne neuer. (343–8)

Yet if resurrection both requires and releases remorseful remembrance, what is being substantiated in Christ's apparitions is an open question in the plays. Is he a ghost? Both Peter and Thomas ask the question.³⁰ Thomas's hand deep in the wound of Christ and his sharing of fish and honeycomb materialize his resurrected body for the apostles but the question of his 'ghostliness' plays on the signification of the word as spirit, third person of the Trinity, and the 'soul of a deceased person', appearing in visible form.³¹

The density of the resurrection narratives give an indication that what is being founded is a new community and a new kind of self in which memory can be redeemed not through the counting and recounting of sin but through a new form of intersubjectivity. In Shakespeare's version of resurrection, it is the agencies of both art and religion, of religion working through the agencies of theatrical art that have become essential to the workings of these narratives.

Resurrection Narratives: II

The trope of resurrection, however, is very far from being unique to Shakespeare. Indeed it is very widely used. It appears in *Antonio and Mellida*, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *The Lady's Tragedy*, *The Dutch Courtesan*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The London Prodigall*, and *The Widow's Tears*, for example, and this list is very far from comprehensive.³² Peter Womack helpfully describes the motif and its immense popularity thus:

³⁰ Thomas in Towneley's *Thomas of India*, 405, 494; Peter at 1.8 and Jesus' response at 135; Peter in Chester's *Christ on the Road to Emmaus*, 175, and again in *The Ascension*, 18.

³¹ OED.

³² Robert Stanley Forsyth lists over a hundred uses of this motif in *The Relation of Shirley's Plays to the Elizabethan Drama* (New York, 1914), 89, cited in B. J. Sokol, *Art and Illusion in The Winter's Tale* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1994), 239 fn 72.

To die is to deploy, as it were, a power which exceeds that of the ruler; death is the outside of the network of relationships that constitute the society of the play. Those who return from death, then, are impossibly able to exercise this uncanny, asocial authority *within* ordinary society. It is a fantasy of justice.³³

This is a perceptive comment and it is borne out, I think, by Thomas Middleton's extraordinary play *The Lady's Tragedy*, a play performed by the King's Men shortly after *The Winter's Tale* in 1611, and which presents a sustained interaction with *The Winter's Tale*.³⁴ Each play features a tyrant; each play flirts with funerary and statuary art and with the language of superstition, idolatry, and iconoclasm; each has a lady in a sequestered 'tomb'. In Middleton's play, 'the tyrant' usurps Govianus' throne and seeks to satisfy his lust on the lady betrothed to Govianus. The lady prefers to die than to submit to his depredations and in a grotesquely staged scene kills herself just before the tyrant's men enter to abduct her. But if Womack suggests that the motif of resurrection stages a 'fantasy of justice' by exercising an uncanny authority within *ordinary* society, the justice remains 'wild' in Middleton's version. The tyrant, seeking to deny the very limits of death, breaks into the cathedral, kisses her effigy, and breaks open the tomb in which she is kept. Govianus disguises himself as a painter called upon by the tyrant to make the lady look as if she is still alive. Painting her lips with poison (in a bizarre reprise of *The Revenger's Tragedy*), he ensures that the lady so 'disguised' as a painted idol will be the instrument of his death when next the tyrant kisses her. The play works in counter-point to the medieval tropes of Easter; the tyrant is Herod and his soldiers are sent not to guard the empty tomb to prevent a resurrection, but to violate and rob the sacred space of the church. The lady 'all in white, stuck with jewels, and a great crucifix on her breast' resembles nothing so much as the images of Christ reserved with the sacrament in the Easter sepulcher until Easter Sunday in the medieval rites (4.4.43). But she is also a conscious reprise and reversal of Hermione. In the one play a living woman poses as a statue: in the other a dead woman is treated as if she were living, and herself delivers death through the

³³ Peter Womack, *English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 303.

³⁴ This play, formerly known as *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (provisionally so titled by the Master of the Revels), has recently been decisively attributed to Middleton and is edited by Julia Briggs in *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). All citations from this path-breaking and exciting new edition of the collected works are from the left-hand text column, which is as close as possible to Middleton's original composition.

necrophiliac desires of the tyrant. Cold in one play, the amazed response to her warmth constitutes the wonder of the other. In one play the hand of art is used to conceal and the tyrant's perverse pleasures are secret; in the other art is revelatory and the event of its disclosure is a *public* event in which the participation of all present is constitutive of the art of theater.

In Middleton's reversal of the usual energies and directions of the trope, we are very far from any return to the 'ordinary' in Womack's phrase. Indeed the camp, expressionist horror of the play is an insistence on the difficulty, not to say impossibility of that task. In short, there is no 'resurrection' in *The Lady's Tragedy*. Justice is revenge and the Lady is the *instrumental object* (her agency as passive as a dead person can be) of Govianus' device. 'I am not here,' says her ghost, a 'voice within' the tomb, when Govianus visits her now empty sepulcher (4.4.40). This is the *non est hic* of the angels on the empty tomb announced to the visiting Marys in the Gospels. The absence of Christ there is the sign of his resurrected presence which must be disseminated in the witness of his apostles. The absence of the lady here can only seem like a stage joke; she is now the material ghost who must be there to give voice to itself, the actor doubling the dead and living bodies—the grammar of 'he is not here' and 'I am not here' so ludicrously different. Middleton's brilliantly iconoclastic play allows us to see anew the commitment to the miracle of the ordinary in Shakespeare's play.

Womack goes on to say that these tropes are authorized by Christ and borrow the 'gestic vocabulary of the theatre . . . which came to an end only twenty years or so before Juliet died and rose again.'³⁵ But the authority of those tropes is unavailable in Middleton's play. Let us now, finally, turn to Shakespeare's great resurrection scene to test out the authority of inheritance there.

Leontes' Shame

However protracted Leontes penitence, however drawn out his sadness, however deeply he repents, his actions and his words cannot secure him forgiveness. Though they are necessary indications of the depth of his repentance (for us as audience, for his audience, most especially for Hermione) they cannot in themselves secure any release from the responsibility for the damage he

³⁵ Womack, *English Renaissance Drama*, 303.

has caused. The discourse on forgiveness in *The Winter's Tale* makes it clear that it must come, like grace, through the very medium of religious theatre. The stillness of Hermione's life (her still life, the still life of her) and Leontes' past actions as set in stone are coterminous. That is why no understanding of the scene is complete without an appreciation of the centrality of Leontes' tears as the sign of his shame to it. To Paulina's praise of the carver's excellence which 'makes her | As she lived now,' Leontes returns to what might have been but is not: 'as now she might have done | So much to my good comfort as it is | Piercing to my soul' (5.3.31–4). Returned to a vision of her self when first he wooed her, he declares his remorse: 'I am ashamed' (5.3.37). It is clear from the words of Camillo and Polixenes at this point that Leontes is crying. Camillo's logic, though motivated by pity and not by politics, uses the same logic of accounting. There is, he claims, no sorrow that could possibly be so great as not to be blown away by sixteen winters. 'My Lord, your sorrow was too sore laid on | Which sixteen winters cannot blow away, | So many summers dry' (5.3.49–51). But Leontes has understood that forgiveness is aporetic. For how can Hermione forgive him? She is dead. And there is nothing he can do that might count as reparation in this instance. The encounter with Paulina after the oracle's declamation has indicated that nothing can come from him that might make any difference, no way of being led away from his sorrows. It is only by fully acknowledging the absolute lucidity of Leontes' remorse that we can credit the final resurrection of his hopes and loves. He lives now fully unprotected by his own fantasies and denials, quite naked before his own terrible actions. The statue gives him a view of Hermione but it is in the felt presence conjured by her likeness, in the sheer promise and gratuity of her return, in the self-forgetful yearning and love conjured into being by the statue that he can also bear the thought of being seen by her and so bear his shame. His remorse, as I have been arguing, has awakened him to the reality of Hermione. In being able to see her, he must be able to bear being seen by her such that both can be brought to new life through this new presencing. His shame and his repentance are then the very substance of the grace he is in the process of receiving and there can be no separation between the two movements.

Cleomines' discourse has been continued in the interventions of Polixenes and Camillo as they attempt to assume the agency of absolution again and to assuage his penitential tears. Yet what the scene is able to realize will be poised on the mutuality of response. Leontes' remorse has awoken him to her reality. But her agency is crucial here. (That is why it is a conscious rejection rather than

an enaction of Ovid's Pygmalion: she is NOT his creation, his fantasy, though Paulina offers that as a teasing possibility.) I imagine that quite what she will do in the chapel when Paulina has drawn the curtain *must* be open. None of the responses can be predicted, they can only be risked. Were Leontes to revert to fantasy, would she hold still? Could she hold still? The demands of human nature would militate against that. Realizing that she is alive is part of the mesmerizing power of this moment, and she will have to move sooner or later because she is woman not stone. But if his responses proved disappointing she cannot, being living, avoid acknowledging him, even if such an acknowledgment takes the form of rebuff. (It does take such form in some stagings and no staging can erase the absent presence of Mamillius in this scene or the weight and waste of time, the pointless, corrosive destruction of love and life.) If she is to re-marry him, if he is now to take her hand in his, it must be that in being warm, it *can* go cold.

Leontes is transformed in his understanding of himself—sinful and redeemed from sin in one and the same moment, as the past is carried into a redeemed memory. And so a new present and a new presence are made possible. 'This is my body,' we might understand Hermione as saying, through which you both remember me and acknowledge me. This is sacramental theater. For in it 'how we present ourselves to each other (the classical domain of theater) and how we are present to each other (the domain of the sacrament)' have once again become both theological and theatrical resources and the Pauline tropes of mortification and vivification are both figurative and actual.³⁶ Here is Donne glossing Shakespeare's play (as I like to think) in his 1626 sermon on I Cor. 15.29:

But this death of desperation, or diffidence in God's mercy, by God's mercy hath swallowed all of us, but the death of sinne hath swallowed us all, and for oure customary sinnes we need a resurrection; And what is that? *Resurrectio a peccato, & cessatio a peccato, non est idem*; every cessation from sin is not a resurrection from sinne. A man may discontinue a sinne, intermit the practice of a sin by infirmity of the body, or by satiety in the sinne, or by the absence of that person, with whom he hath used to communicate in that sin. But *Resurrectio, est secunda ejus, quod interit station*. A resurrection, is such an abstinence from the practice of the sin, as is grounded upon a repentance, and a detestation of the sin, and then it is a setting and an establishment of the soule in that state, and disposition: it is not a sudden and transitory remorse, nor onely a reparation of that

³⁶ From my *Signifying God*, xv.

which was ruined, and demolished, but it is a building up of habits contrary to former habits, and customes, in actions contrary to that sin, that we have been accustomed to. Else it is but an Intermission, not a Resurrection, but a starting, not a waking; but an apparition, not a living body; but a cessation, not a peace of conscience.³⁷

In many of the scenes of return and recollection that I alluded to earlier, there comes a moment when the sudden apparition of the returning figure hovers between the insubstantial and the substantial. So the king in *All's Well* will wonder if Helena is real, and Pericles will wonder whether Marina is flesh and blood and not an angel or a blessed spirit. These meanings hover between a gift so wonderful it cannot be of this world, and a sense of imminent haunting loss—and they might say, as the resurrected Christ does: ‘for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see me here’ (Luke 24.39).

Perhaps the most extended trope of this kind of encounter is that between the twins, Sebastian and Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Viola is in man’s clothing, so she mirrors Sebastian exactly. This time the question is not: are you flesh and blood? but are you a spirit? Yes, says Sebastian, ‘but am in that dimension grossly clad | Which from the womb I did participate’ (5.1.237–8). He could have said—no, I am flesh and blood. But he chooses to animate the other meaning of ghost—not a spirit from the dead but that which gives life to mortal bodies. Do we need the Lutheran joke on ubiquity to see how this figure is borrowing a sacramental affect, a sacramental effect?³⁸ This is recognition as realization, a recognition that slowly grants the reality of the other’s ensouled body, which loss has made so precious.

But Sebastian’s Eucharistic language is not just a localized joke of here and there, *hic et ubique*, a joke repeated in *Hamlet* as Stephen Greenblatt has reminded us. When Calvin in the *Institutes* pours scorn on this same Lutheran doctrine, he says that Luther renders Christ into a ‘phantasm’. And his subsequent discussion of Christ’s resurrected body coheres with exactly the kind of exploration of faith and credence, of realization as occurs in this same statue scene. In Book IV of the *Institutes* Calvin discusses the appearances of the resurrected Christ in a Eucharistic idiom. He is here concerned to distinguish his views, on the one hand, from the gross absurdity of the papist view of the sacrament, and

³⁷ *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953–62), vii:216.

³⁸ ‘I never had a brother | Nor can there be that deity in my nature | Of here and everywhere’ (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.226–7).

conversely from the view that envisages faith itself as a 'mere imagining', one that therefore has no reality and again from the view that sees participation in Christ as the product of an intellectual understanding only (therefore purely cognitive).³⁹ The paradigm of participation is, of course, the Eucharist, the 'sacred supper' and he proceeds to a dense commentary on John 6. It is here that he reserves his greatest scorn for Luther's idea. The Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity, he claims, opens the door to Marcionism. In so doing it makes the body of Christ a 'phantom or apparition'.⁴⁰ In insisting that faith in the body of Christ operates *effectually* and in a realm distinct both from 'merely human imagining' (in which case it is subjective and in the domain of human fantasy) and from the reach of epistemology (mere knowledge), the resurrection appearances are intrinsically linked to faith's reality. This is at stake in the fleshliness of Christ and the fleshliness of Hermione. What Shakespeare adds to Calvin is the centrality, beauty, and miracle of what Calvin might call the 'merely human'. Shakespeare utterly abjures the eradication of the human in reformed versions of grace. For it was axiomatic to reformed grace that as God-given—and in order to be understood as God-given—it must be free of all human words and deeds. It is human response that is, for him, rather the medium of grace.

'It is Required | You do Awake Your Faith': Shakespeare's Theater of Faith

So how could it not be the case that all who attend these mysteries—the audience on the stage and the audience off it—must awake their faith? The Johannine resurrection narrative takes it as axiomatic that the resurrected Christ appears only to those who believe. Indeed John never uses a noun for the term faith, but only a verb: faith is not something that you have but something you do. Of the other disciple who reached the empty tomb before Peter, the author of the fourth Gospel says: 'Then went in also that other disciple which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed' (John 20.8–9).

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.17.6, 1366.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.17.17, 1380.

We are not told that these disciples believed because they remembered the scriptural predictions of resurrection.⁴¹ The risen Lord appears only to those who believe in him. It is just such a distinction that Augustine is at pains to make in his commentary on John 6: 'that you should believe in him; not that you should believe things about him' (*Ut credatis in eum, non, ut credatis ei*). He goes on to say: 'But if you believe in him that is because you believe what you have heard about him, whereas whoever believes things about him does not by that fact believe in him; for the demons too believe truths about him but still do not believe in him.' In Augustine's vital distinction between belief in a person and belief about that person, we might discern how the prevailing cognitivist models that inform so much of the discourse on religion in the current academy understand belief in terms of 'about' not 'in'. And for the statue scene we don't need to believe any set of precepts at all to have the experience available to us. But we do have to trust Paulina's authority. So both John and Paulina understand that the credibility of the resurrection is bound to the credence of believers. Indeed this is simply a tautology. So Paulina's banishment of all those unwilling to awaken their faith is an impeccably orthodox statement, a philosophical and theological tautology one might say. And it is vital that what she says is that what is required is that you awake your faith, not that you willingly suspend your disbelief. The latter notion is in contemporary usage at least tutored in cognitivist (and in the end I think incoherent) models.⁴² The condition of wonder that the scene seeks to cultivate is not at all attendant upon belief but rather of immediate attunements and attitudes.⁴³ The statue scene, one might say following Charles Altieri, rests on commitments not

⁴¹ A point made in Rowan A. Greer, *Christian Life and Christian Hope: Raids on the Inarticulate* (New York: Crossroad, 2001).

⁴² See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Believing: A Historical Perspective* (Oxford: One World, 1977). Cantwell Smith charts the modernizing tendency to make 'belief' propositional and charts its ancient and medieval use as predominantly part of a 'credo'. He observes that Shakespeare's use of 'belief' is nearly always in the form of a verb, not a noun, and furthermore that the first and second person uses of that verb outnumber the third person uses by a ratio of 9 to 1. This observation rests on the crucial distinction between 'I believe' and 'he believes.' 'I believe' is not only self-engaging but descriptive of the external world, but 'he believes' is descriptive only of his state of mind. For example, 'I believe that it is raining' is a statement about the weather. 'He believes that it is raining' is not.

⁴³ This is importantly explored in Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003), 122. See also, T. G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 17–41, 125–75, for the best account of wonder in Shakespeare's work and for a fine reading of *The Winter's Tale*.

opinions.⁴⁴ We do not need to rely on notions of make-believe.⁴⁵ The primacy of belief-based modes of analysis then only obscure the working of this scene and its modes of recovery precisely from the epistemic modes of understanding. So it is also vital that Leontes' faith is as foundationless as his doubt has been. This is what makes it and the new community founded on it so fragile and so central. *The Winter's Tale* has been called a miracle play. But the miracle is only ordinary just as another human life is both miraculous and ordinary. It is as if theater requires the resources of both art and religion because credit and trust have come to seem not so much the ground of our intelligibility to each other, but phenomena that require a miracle.

In an astonishingly prescient series of reflections in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, Thomas More's narrator argues with a figure called 'the messenger' who, having been infected with Lutheran heresy, comes to argue the position of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*. What emerges in his pressingly skeptical inquiries is that nothing will lay to rest his doubts and fears. The dialogue simply breaks off in a shared meal. But at one point of the dialogue, the narrator compares the messenger to someone who is trying to prove that his father is really his. If you needed proof of everything, he suggests, you would constantly doubt your own origins and legitimacy. The whole proof would rest on one woman and she would have the most cause to lie:

Let the knowledge of the father alone therefore amonge our wittys mysteriyes. And let us se yf we byleue nothyng but that we se our selfe who can reken hymmselfe sure of his owne mother for possible it were that he were changed in the cradell.⁴⁶

More's fundamental point is that the messenger is simply unanswerable on his own terms and that he has forgotten the most fundamental forms of trust on which our everyday relations are habitually based. Such skepticism is, he implies, both completely compelling and utterly corrosive for its practitioners' most basic relations and therefore self-understandings. You cannot prove who you are. He could be describing Leontes who doubts not his father's paternity,

⁴⁴ Altieri, *Particulars of Rapture*, 125.

⁴⁵ See Richard Moran, 'The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *Philosophical Review* 101 (1994), 75–106.

⁴⁶ Thomas More, *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, vol. vi: *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, ed. T. M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc'hadour, and Richard Marius (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 64.

but his own. More's casting of this fundamental problem—in 1529—shows that a man's fears about paternity and the most divisive religious issues of his culture can feed off the same world and soul-destroying perspective, whose attempted cure will only push him more deeply into the disease of doubt. Wittgenstein says, 'The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief.'⁴⁷ But to explore the relation of the question of doubt to the question of childhood and its vulnerabilities in this play is the topic of a different essay.

⁴⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

3

Towards a History of Performativity

Sacrament, Social Contract, and *The Merchant of Venice*

Elizabeth Fowler

Do you confess the bond?

—*The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.181)

As Austin insists, in the case of illocutionary acts, even though it may be only implicit in various grammatical forms, ‘The “I” who is doing the action does . . . come essentially into the picture’ (p. 61). So I might comparably say: In perlocutionary acts, the ‘you’ comes essentially into the picture. But how is this second person established? What does this difference amount to?

—Stanley Cavell¹

In this essay I shall entertain the notion that performativity itself—let’s call it the sum of the conditions surrounding the efficacy of language and its acts—changes over time. My case will be drawn from Shakespeare’s imaginative reaction to the Protestant reformation of the sacraments of the medieval church, especially penance.² If the sacraments perform and thus produce

¹ Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 180.

² This line of thought began in conversation with Sarah Beckwith and Heather Hirschfeld, for which I’m grateful. The work of Sarah Beckwith has powerfully influenced the consensus I cite below. See for instance her *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

community, as the consensus among medievalists runs, then what happens when they are radically altered in the Reformation? How are social persons created and recognized?³ How is society achieved? Social contract theories, ages old and sometimes compatible with sacramental thought, sometimes distinct, offer one of the alternatives available to Reformation society.

Shakespeare concentrates our attention on contracts and social bonds with *The Merchant of Venice*, a play designed around a series of scenes of successful, interrupted, or failed contracts. These scenes ought, I think, to earn a place among the recurrent scenes and propositions that make up the canon of political philosophy. The play marshals a powerful critique of theories of social contract: in Shakespeare's hands, social contract is a scene that pretends to justice but is deeply damaged by ideological interpellation, political disability, and the systematic exploitation of identity—a scene designed not so much to make others present, to acknowledge, to recognize, or to endow them with personhood, but too often to banish them, to injure their personhood, and to subject them to civil death.

In suggesting that we read the play as offering a series of versions of social contract, I want to say that the Reformation conversion of the sacraments is an important event in the history of social contract theory and in the history of performativity itself: important because the sacraments are crucial rituals of polity building for the ecclesiastical state; important because penitential theology and practices have a power to explain and produce interiority that can only be dreamed of by literary fiction in these centuries; important because much of economic and political thought about what glues human beings together into polities grows out of sacramental discourse and its constructions of intention, interests, and the passions. Histories of social contract (even by feminists like Carol Pateman⁴) tend to make it seem as if enlightenment accounts grow more or less out of the primordial ooze of antiquity, but late medieval and early modern English thought about the formation of society is powerful and influential for centuries. Here I am thinking of political thought as various as that of the chroniclers, of legal thinkers like Bracton and John of Salisbury, of writers of romances on the matter of Britain, of political pamphleteers like Fortescue and Milton. As a body of thought, though it is largely unrecognized

³ On social persons, see my *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2003).

⁴ Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1988).

as that, this discourse is very interested in marriage and economic trade as indices of civilization. These writers liberally mix canon law questions with topics and approaches from Portia's civil law and English common and customary law. The canon law was preserved by the Reformation church courts, and legal historians have found a much greater than expected reception of the ancient Roman civil law in English jurisprudence, a fact perhaps unsurprising to audiences of *The Merchant of Venice*.⁵ In this play, Shakespeare revives romance topoi on political topics like consent, the conditions of vows, and social choice, and he combines them with explicitly jurisprudential discussions of intention, mercy, and entitlement, topics with a natural home in sacramental theology.

The vision of efficacious social contract I have in mind is staged by Shakespeare within a contest between Judaic and Christian styles of society.⁶ Yet this contrast serves in part as a screen for a historically more urgent contest between pre- and post-Reformation models of sin and forgiveness—between a Catholic rite of assessing the state of the soul to a more secular, juridical, and economic evaluation of a citizen's well being sanctioned by strains within Protestantism.⁷ In *The Merchant of Venice*, Christian recognition aspires by means of propositions to a grace and mercy that 'droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven' (4.1.185), yet in its speech acts is a violent and sophistical stripping of rights, authority, property, legal capacity, and even identity from its victim. I speak, of course, of the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, which 'recognizes' which is the merchant and which the Jew (4.1.170), and which manages to seem to preserve, in Antonio's words, 'the justice of the state, | Since that the trade and profit of the city | Consisteth of all nations' (3.3.28). When Shylock is legally recognized as an alien conspirator, he is undone—brought to civil death. The contract is dissolved with his dissolution. And so we see something of the injuries produced by an apparently equitable social contract, its little light shining in the darkness that is Belmont's apparently peaceable kingdom.

In the Duke's courtroom, Portia raises many issues from penitential theology in her speech on mercy. But that isn't in fact where the legal issues of the case

⁵ On the preservation of the canon law see R. H. Helmholz, *Roman Canon Law in Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).

⁶ See Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962), 327–43.

⁷ Stephen Orgel's nice point about the Englishness of the name 'Shylock' (together with other economic and theological points) leads him to ask that we see Shylock 'as a kind of Puritan' (*Imagining Shakespeare: A History of Texts and Visions* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 154).

lie—Portia’s judgment against Shylock does not depend on Christian transformations of Judaic law and its ‘new’ ideological framework of sin, repentance, and grace. She relies, rather, on a property law distinction between title and possession.⁸ Shylock is shown to have title to (ownership rights in) Antonio’s flesh but not to be able to seize it (possess and hold it) without criminal wrongdoing.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| PORTIA | A pound of that same merchant’s flesh is thine,
The court awards it, and the law doth give it. |
| SHYLOCK | Most rightful judge! |
| PORTIA | And you must cut this flesh from off his breast,
The law allows it, and the court awards it. |
| SHYLOCK | Most learned judge, a sentence! Come prepare! |
| PORTIA | Tarry a little, there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
The words expressly are ‘a pound of flesh’.
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh,
But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the laws of Venice confiscate
Unto the state of Venice. |
- (4.1.299–312)

Portia’s rather gorgeous and much studied earlier speech on mercy (or against Judaism) has busied her admiring legal historians in lots of disquisitions on equity.⁹ The topic of equity has perhaps distracted scholars from noticing the very effective and familiar strategy she employs in the second half of the recognition scene, in which Shylock is discovered as a murderer.

The distinction between title and possession is of enormous importance in English common law, and though its application to Antonio’s flesh is rather bizarre, it isn’t the play’s only extension of the principle.¹⁰ The same distinction is applied sexually and structures the closing scene of the play and all the jokes about rings. Though the marriage vows are uttered, sexual possession

⁸ I broach the point about title and possession in ‘Shylock’s Virtual Injuries’, *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006), 56–64.

⁹ Who could be against equity? But in England equity is not simply a legal principle of fairness, it designates a specific jurisdiction, and therefore an institution one might be critical of. This speech might profitably turn the audience’s attention to the court of chancery, called the ‘court of equity’, or to the tyrannies of the Crown’s prerogative courts more generally.

¹⁰ For the best introduction to the theology of circumcision evoked by the play see James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996).

is deferred by the strife between Antonio and Shylock. Portia takes title, as it were, to Bassanio—but not possession of him:

PORTIA First go with me to church, and call me wife,
 And then away to Venice to your friend;
 For never shall you lie by Portia's side
 With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold
 To pay the petty debt twenty times over.
 When it is paid, bring your true friend along.
 My maid Nerissa and myself mean time
 Will live as maids and widows. Come away!
 For you shall hence upon your wedding-day. (3.2.163–71)

Earlier in the scene, marriage has been figured extravagantly by Portia as the creation of a commonwealth in the long similes and metaphors of her engaging vows. Speaking of herself, she says:

PORTIA Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.
 Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
 Is now converted. But now I was the lord
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
 Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
 This house, these servants, and this same myself
 Are yours—my lord's!—I give them with this ring . . . (3.2.163–71)

Putting herself in the self-sovereign role of a contracting agent voluntarily submitting to the *dominus* of a new commonwealth, she drives home the point that marriage is a social contract in the large (later, Hobbesian) sense. Bassanio, of course, responds in kind by styling Portia as a 'beloved prince' and himself as the people performing the acclamation that ratifies her sovereignty.

But the scene of contract is interrupted. With 'come away!' Portia suspends the marriage sacrament at a point that neatly draws the line between title and possession. The ancient custom that marital vows entitle spouses to claims upon each another but must be completed by sexual possession in order to perfect the sacrament was not entirely endorsed by ecclesiastical law (which, after all, could not happily make Jesus a bastard) but retained a very strong presence. Bassanio goes so far as to vow not to get in any bed at all before his return:

bride, of course he vehemently repudiates a true bond to Shylock. The scene of the contract in Act I has already shown him nastily refusing to admit that making such a bond creates a kind of friendship. Yet economic trade (with or without usury) is treated as a primary creator of bonds among persons and thus a primary motive and source of human society in early economic writers from Aristotle to the scholastics to early modern English writers who habitually translate Aristotle's key term as 'friendship'.¹² 'Bond' is certainly the most important word in *The Merchant of Venice*. Every scene revolves around some kind of bond-making, some performative rite of social contract. The bond for debt is pursued *as a condition of* and *in analogy to* the several bonds of marriage. Launcelot's bond of service is another echo that acknowledges the role of class in binding society together. 'Fast bind, fast bind,' says Shylock (2.5.54). At the center of each bond is a ritual incorporating a pair of speech acts and requiring a *confession* of the bond and a *recognition* of newly created social persons: a husband and wife where there were none before, a set of friends where there were enemies, a new master and servant, and so forth. These occasions of contract bring society into being.

But contracts of these kinds tear apart the world as well as bind it together, and persons are unmade as well as created by new titles. Antonio is undone, Shylock suffers civil death, and less dramatically, when he gives Portia's ring away, Bassanio loses his status almost as soon as the triumphant Jason has achieved it. Scenes of contract are scenes of recognition that lean forward. They create new persons and destroy others. They create new corporate institutions. They are perfect test cases for any of us who are, as I am, interested in developing a political speech act theory that seeks to describe the way that language, habits, and literary artifacts participate in the history of commonwealths, or interested in how the institutional arrangements of the state participate in the history of performativity.

J. L. Austin is brilliant in emphasizing institutions in *How to Do Things with Words*, his first account of performative speech.¹³ Performativity relies not merely on individual speakers, but on utterances and their social conditions in the largest sense. Because the formulae of utterances and their conditions change over time, performativity itself has a history that has not yet been written. What it means to stage the scene of the creation of society, the scene of social contract, *changes* in the course of the English Reformation as the sacra-

¹² For an illuminating discussion of theories of trade, see Lianna Farber, *An Anatomy of Trade in Medieval England: Value, Consent, and Community* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006).

¹³ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962).

ments and their speech acts are debated, reformed, and absorbed into other kinds of jurisdictions.

Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* is very aware of itself as swimming against the stream of previous twentieth-century philosophers, who are interested above all in assessing propositions for their truth value. We are in a position to see Austin as a reviver of sorts, because sacramental theology is very interested in performativity and the peculiarities of trying to describe it. Questions of agency, of the status of words in performing actions, of the effects of emotion and intention, of impediments that lie in the persons who speak vows or in the form of their utterances—all these topics arise in profound ways as medieval and early modern theologians worry about the sacraments and their effects on individuals, on God, and on the ecclesiastical polity. Penitential literature itself is a hot-bed of thought about intention and recognition. The sacrament of marriage was the proving ground for intricate and brilliant thought about the credentials and eligibility of the parties to enact the sacrament. What age and consanguinity permit consent? What constitutes illegitimate coercion? How important is parental consent? Can the parties be of disparate ages, races, classes?¹⁴

The other place in early thought where intentions, deeds, and consequences were delicately and extensively treated is in the law of commercial contract, also part of the canon law's late medieval jurisdiction. There, a topic of exquisite description is how the (performative) written language of legal deeds carries a validity that must be carefully safeguarded. Yet legal discourse on commerce says virtually nothing about the eligibility of the contracting parties; it speaks eloquently only of the deed itself. What terms might invalidate a contract? What records are necessary? What is the role of custom in regulating the terms of a contract? The nature and status of oaths, vows, and promises constitute an important topic for marriage law and commercial law—and both bodies of thought draw on penitential discourse to understand the vow. It is the speech act of the vow that ties together all the instances of contract in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Performative language effects the creation of society that is the central topic of social contract theory, and what Shakespeare's scenes show us is that

¹⁴ On early English marriage generally, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), and Charles Donahue, Jr., 'The Canon Law on the Formation of Marriage and Social Practice in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), 1–53. R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), gives us a picture of these legal issues in litigation.

this creation must be constantly renewed in the judgements of the courts, in the speeches of lovers, in the deals made in the marketplace. When social contract is viewed as this kind of palimpsest of the many sorts of speech acts and contracts taking place daily, then we are invited to think on the one hand about whether race should in fact be considered an impediment to economic contract (though commercial law acts as if its actors are entirely without race) and, on the other, whether a marriage should be evaluated for the economic equity of its terms (though marriage law acts as if there can be no inequity during the life of its contract). Penitential theology, with its refined command of intention, affect, sin, speech, grace, and performativity itself, presents us with a most important set of criteria for contract theory in all these areas. This is why the play interrupts the marriage in order to resolve the economic contract. We are asked to imagine the total speech situation, to use Austin's terms, that we require for a felicitous marriage vow, and, by extension, what we might require for a felicitous social contract. What counts as felicity when contracts are motivated by racism and other kinds of systematic hatreds? Can such corrupt motives and intentions (here we are in the domain of penitential thought) enter into our sense of the justice of contract? Shakespeare is adding sets of conditions that make social contract theory a good deal more complex and disturbing than John Locke imagines it to be. Political theory needs an account of intentionality and emotion that has the richness of that in penitential theology. It needs an account of equitable terms that has the richness of that in the law of commerce. It needs an account of the eligibility of its agents that has the richness of that in marriage law. It may well be that the Reformation of the sacraments presents us with a momentous shift in performativity, a sea-change recorded in Shakespeare's theater.

Yet all this is to make the play's effects sound like a lot of propositions, which they are not. Shakespeare is entirely more interested in making us feel the disabilities to contract presented by gender and race (and the energies that can sometimes circumvent those disabilities) than he is in setting up a positive model of the constitution of society. The play unleashes nasty, unsavory, and delightful passions of various kinds and seems to enjoy the fallout. The most penetrating insight into the performative rituals of society is given to those characters with the most vulnerable legal incapacities. In this play people are wearied and demoralized by the friction between their bodies and the legal persons they occupy, and audiences are both harmed and fascinated by their often sadistic rehearsals and reinscriptions of the injuries caused by their

incapacities. As if one could fully possess what one is entitled to without confessing it and then being recognized, Shylock says, 'I'll have *no speaking*, I *will* have my bond' (3.3.17 Emphasis added). He wants to stop the speech acts of contract and to possess what jurisprudence and political philosophy have promised him. Because speech acts lie at the center of the constitution of society in the play, it's worth acknowledging soberly that a lot of those speeches can be classed as hate speech. That's the dark view of social contract: its scenes of recognition are dressed up as grace but so often produce civil death. The rituals of social contract may give some of us titles to satisfaction, to an Austinian (and even Jeffersonian) felicity, but cannot reliably give us possession of it.

4

Losing France and Becoming England

Shakespeare's *King John* and the Emergence
of State-Based Diplomacy

John Watkins

On January 7, 1558, the English Middle Ages ended. On that day, the Duke of Guise defeated the English at Calais and reclaimed the city for the King of France.¹ Mary I famously proclaimed that the loss was her deathblow and told her subjects that if they opened her corpse, they would find 'Calais' inscribed on the heart of her corpse.² English monarchs had claimed territory in France since the Norman Conquest, and they had claimed the French Crown since 1328. Although English monarchs styled themselves Kings and Queens of France until 1800, the title became a romantic anachronism. Within a half-century after Mary's death, English expansion shifted away from the

¹ For further discussion of the fall of Calais and its international significance, see C. S. L. Davies, 'England and the French War', in Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler (eds), *The Mid-Tudor Polity, 1540–1560* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 159–85; David Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor: Politics, Government, and Religion in England, 1553–1558* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979).

² John Foxe offers the earliest account of this remark (*The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattle (London, 1839), viii:625).

European continent to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.³ Losing France was an important precondition for England's oceanic future, since it detached the country from the costly territorial wars that had shaped its foreign policy for centuries. Elizabeth's forty-five-year reign witnessed the first political and economic phases of this transformation, and Shakespeare's theater accompanied it with a vision of England's new independence from an older European order.

Scholars have given Shakespeare a pivotal role in their accounts of the emergence of modernity from its medieval antecedents. By identifying the modern with the consolidation of divergent components within the nation-state, they often write as if English nation-building took place entirely within England. Doing so seriously distorts our understanding of what it means to be a nation. Shakespeare himself wrote within a broadly European context. He adapted continental sources for most of his comedies and tragedies, and even in his English history plays, he often depicts medieval political life in terms of conflicts between England and France. The narrative of modernity that his plays enact ends with a clearly bounded English state, but it begins with radically different models of sovereignty that are not nation-based, anglophone, or even insular. His history plays in particular invite us to interpret the emergence of modernity as a function less of the state's increasing internal coherence than of its changing relationship to other European powers. In the process, the plays associate the end of the Middle Ages with the waning of dynastic and diplomatic practices that united ruling houses with conspicuous disregard for the cultural and linguistic characters of the territories they ruled. *King John* opens up enough rifts between medieval and early modern diplomatic practice to remind us that there has not always been an England as such, and that its political and cultural distinction from France was not an obvious truth but a historically contingent and ideologically loaded construction.

King John, which dramatizes England's first major loss of French territory, can be read as his most complex commentary on his country's sixteenth-century

³ For further discussion of this Atlanticist reorientation, see David Harris Sacks, *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450–1700* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991); Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).

place in an emerging European state system.⁴ A major diplomatic revolution occurred in England's relationship with France during Elizabeth's reign. If Mary I was the last English monarch to hold land in France, Elizabeth I was the first to orchestrate a foreign policy without continental territorial ambitions.⁵ Rather than being an enemy, France became a qualified ally against Hapsburg expansion in Europe and the Atlantic. Elizabeth achieved this cautious alliance without contracting the kind of interdynastic marriage that had served as the lynchpin of European diplomacy since at least the tenth century. She certainly considered the possibility of such a marriage, and in the late 1570s came close to marrying the Duke of Alençon. But, in the end, she did not. The significance of her decision should not be underestimated. Rejecting a French marriage decisively removed England from the cycle of wars and treaties that, from a sixteenth-century perspective, compromised England's independence. Above all, it enabled the eventual emergence of a national foreign policy detached from dynastic interests and shielded against the vagaries of biology.

The cultural fallout over England's developing alliance with France, and more broadly, the shift from a dynastic to a state-based diplomacy surfaced strikingly on the English stage, where the new genre of the history play arose through revisionary recollections of the Middle Ages that commented implicitly on current events. One of the earliest plays in the genre, Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*, for example, is redolent of Francophobia in its burlesque treatments of Joan of Arc and of Henry's French consort, Margaret of Anjou, whose meddlings in English

⁴ For prior discussion of Shakespeare's relationship to France, see Deanne Williams, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004); Linda Gregerson, 'French Marriages and the Protestant Nation in Shakespeare's History Plays', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, vol. ii: *The Histories*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 246–62. See also the essays collected in the special issue edited by Ronnie Mulryne on 'France in the English and French Theater of the Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies* 9 (1995). See also the 'Shakespeare and France' special issue of *Shakespeare Yearbook* 5 (1994), edited by Holger Klein and Jean-Marie Maguin.

⁵ There is a substantial bibliography on the development of the Elizabethan French policy. See especially Richard Bruce Wernham, *The Making of Elizabethan Foreign Policy, 1558–1603* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980); *idem*, *Before the Armada: The Emergence of the English Nation, 1485–1588* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966); *idem*, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe, 1588–1595* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Susan Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: St Martin's, 1999); Wallace MacCaffrey, *The Shaping of the Elizabethan Regime, Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 1572–1588* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981); *idem*, *Elizabeth I: War and Politics, 1588–1603* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992).

politics help trigger the Wars of the Roses.⁶ As Linda Gregerson has noted, such plays drive home a clear propagandistic message, one fully consonant with the opposition to the Anjou match voiced by John Stubbes, Sir Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser.⁷

But this conspicuously Francophobic topicality marks only the surface of the plays' more important intervention in European diplomatic history. Like John Stubbs' notorious *Gaping Gulf*, Spenser's poetry, and Holinshed's newly printed *Chronicles* on which they were based, the Elizabethan history plays redirected a discourse of foreign affairs once restricted to monarchs and their inner circle of advisors into a larger public arena. Traditionally, even Parliament avoided open discussion of the royal marriages that were the typical lynchpins of medieval peace settlements. Elizabeth made it clear that she did not want to see her Parliaments debate her marriage choices or questions about the succession. This underscores the revolutionary character of 1590s history plays as a medium that broadened the country's interest in and knowledge of affairs of state. They mark an important stage in the diffusion of diplomatic literacy beyond the court, one with major implications for seventeenth-century politics.⁸

The diplomatic vision that these plays promote depended on a tendentious interpretation of the Middle Ages that contemporary medievalists are still working to overcome. The closer that writers drew to a concept of a nation-state in which sovereignty resided in the collective will of a people who shared a common culture and history, the more they read that concept back in the medieval past.⁹ Elizabethan writers narrated medieval events as if words like 'England' and 'France' possessed uncontested, transhistorical significance. Shakespeare's history plays, for example, exploited the ambiguity of these words as designators of persons—'France' meaning the *King* of France and 'France'

⁶ See Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents*, The New Historicism, 6 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 51–105; Williams, *The French Fetish*, 189–93.

⁷ See Gregerson, 'French Marriages and the Protestant Nation'.

⁸ Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).

⁹ In one famous formulation, seventeenth-century radicals discounted the entire period between the Conquest and the fall of Charles I as a foreign occupation, a 'Norman Yoke' finally doffed by Parliamentarians committed to contractual theory of government. See Christopher Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', in his *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (1958; rpt. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997).

meaning the country across the Channel—to treat dynastic conflicts anachronistically as national ones. Dynastic intermarriage made it entirely possible that ‘France’—meaning a King of France—might have a legitimate claim to the English throne. But Shakespeare so closely associates ‘France’ with a distinctly foreign cultural geography that the idea of a Frenchman sitting on the English throne carried suggestions of complete political, legal, and social subjugation. French Kings ought to speak French and stay on their side of the Channel, and English Kings not only ought to speak English, but, like Shakespeare’s Henry V, should even have a hard time speaking French. But that is not how medieval dynastic politics worked.

No play exposes the contradictions between the expansionist continental agendas of medieval monarchs and Elizabeth’s defensive, even isolationist one more dramatically than *King John*. Critics have often commented on the play’s representational instabilities. *King John* is so contradictory in terms of plot, characterization, tone, and apparent political direction that it poses unique challenges to directors and actors. As Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin note, ‘every attempt to resolve the action or make sense of it is immediately frustrated by the moral ambiguities of an episodic plot where success and failure ride on the shifting winds of chance.’¹⁰ The play seems to be moving in two different directions at once, toward a castigation of John and his associates as corrupt and toward an endorsement of them as defenders of England against foreign threats. The bastard Falconbridge, for example, begins as a vice figure driven by self-interest, but ends up as the quintessential English patriot boasting of his country’s independence: ‘Nought shall make us rue | If England to itself do rest but true’ (5.7.117–18). Nothing in the plot accounts for the change. Shakespeare’s portrayal of King John is just as contradictory. He appears as a child murderer with dubious claims to the throne, but he also champions England’s independence and denounces the Pope in soundly patriotic, albeit anachronistically Protestant, language: ‘no Italian priest | Shall tithe or toll in our dominions’ (3.1.153–4). John is simultaneously devious and incompetent, a usurper and a patriot, a murderer and a proto-Protestant.

¹⁰ Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 119. See also David Womersley’s discussion of the Bastard as a response to political fracture in ‘The Politics of Shakespeare’s *King John*’, *Review of English Studies* 40 (1989), 497–515; Michael Manheim, ‘The Four Voices of the Bastard’, in *King John: New Perspectives*, ed. D. T. Curren-Aquino (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1989), 126–35.

While *King John*'s contradictions cannot be explained on the basis of its characters' psychological developments, they do organize themselves around a central ideological tension between the dynastically motivated diplomacy of the Middle Ages and an emergent state-based diplomacy that would become one of the hallmarks of modernity. *King John* reminds us that the contradictions inherent in early modern state development did not manifest themselves only internally as the conflict between rival sectors of the emergent nation. They also manifested themselves in the relationships between and among dynastic states that experienced the modernizing process of consolidation and bureaucratic centralization at different rates and in radically divergent ways.

At the heart of *King John*'s contradictions is a very odd ideological feat: it turns what might look like a national disaster—the loss of England's French territories—into a national triumph. It privileges the collapse of John's trans-channel Angevin *imperium* as the beginning of England's history as a fiercely independent nation standing against the other countries of Europe. This *felix culpa* is the paradox on which most of the play's representational contradictions finally rest. The play confuses us because it presents John's dynastic catastrophe—his loss of the massive territories consolidated by his father Henry II's marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine—as the birth of a culturally, linguistically, and politically coherent England. In doing so, it also presents the *felix culpa* of John's reign as an imperfect pretext for the happy losses of Elizabeth: the fall of Calais, her failure to marry the Duke of Anjou or any other continental suitor, and her de facto abandonment of dynastic politics.

To make sense of Shakespeare's interventions in *King John*, I want to turn first to the Angevin world that his play represents. Nothing could have contrasted more emphatically with the highly centralized Tudor monarchy confined to the British archipelago than the sprawling trans-Channel constellation of kingdoms, duchies, counties, and fiefdoms claimed by John, his father Henry II, and his elder brother Richard I.¹¹ England's Henry II was born in what is today modern France. He inherited titles not only to his family's duchy of Anjou but also to the duchy of Normandy and to the counties of Maine and Touraine. He also achieved one of the Middle Ages' most brilliant territorial

¹¹ For a useful general survey of the political dynamics of Angevin state formation, see Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075–1225*, *The New Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 1–102. See also John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).

alliances by marrying Eleanor of Aquitaine, the heir to most of France's southwestern quarter. He then successfully pressed his claims to England and Ireland. Combined with shakier holds on Brittany and Toulouse, these lands gave Henry II the largest land mass controlled by a western European ruler since Charlemagne.¹²

Historians still struggle to give Henry's assemblage of territories and subjects a name that does not impose on it anachronistic understandings of sovereignty, nationhood, colonization, and empire.¹³ To avoid the anachronistic implications of words like 'nation' or 'empire' in reference to the Angevin possessions, I will follow the example of the thirteenth-century chronicles, who spoke of Henry II's *imperium*.¹⁴ Nothing united the Angevin territories into anything remotely resembling a modern nation. They lacked a common language, political administration, legal system, military organization, coinage, and even foreign policy. 'King of England' was the first of Henry II's titles, but only because a kingship conveyed greater heraldic glory than a dukedom. Unlike the kings in Shakespeare's two tetralogies, Henry II was a French-born and French-speaking noble identified with the *langue d'oïl* culture of northern France.

Although Henry's immediate successor Richard I was born in Oxford, he was arguably more francocentric in orientation than any other English monarch. As a small child, he moved to Aquitaine, where his mother Eleanor proclaimed him duke in 1174 and where he imbibed the Poitevin culture of troubadours in all its emphatically un-English richness. He succeeded his father as king of England in 1189, but spent only six months of his eventful ten-year reign on English soil. Much to the irritation of his subjects in England who had to help pay his bills, Richard spent most of his reign as a Crusader in the Middle East and as a prisoner in Germany. He died from gangrene after a minor skirmish in the Limousin and was buried, like his parents, at Fontevrault Abbey in Anjou. He asked that his heart be removed and buried not in England but in the Norman capital of Rouen as a final reminder of his fundamentally French orientation.¹⁵

¹² See Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (1950; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), 75–81; Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, 18–21.

¹³ See Gillingham's discussion of the nomenclature problem (*ibid.* 2–5).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 3–4.

¹⁵ John Gillingham, *Richard I, Yale English Monarchs* (1999; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 24–40.

Richard's death led to a succession crisis that is the focus of Shakespeare's play. Both Richard's brother John and his nephew Arthur of Brittany—the son of Richard's deceased elder brother Geoffrey—claimed title to the Angevin *imperium*. Precisely because John had been a younger son and never expected to rule, he had spent more of his time in England—the less politically significant portion of the realm—than in France. His greater familiarity with English domains helped to make him the preferred choice of the English barons, while Arthur was the preferred choice of barons in France. Although the conflict was always one over seigneurial prerogatives and allegiances rather than anything like modern national identities, this territorial accident had important consequences for later historiography, including the composition of Shakespeare's play. John eventually lost everything on the French mainland, with the exception of Gascony, to the expansionist Capetian king Philip Augustus. While Philip Augustus emerged as the most powerful king in Europe, John ended his reign fighting off an invasion of England itself by Philip's son, the future Louis VIII. John thus found himself in the dubious role of a King of England in the sense of someone who, unlike his father, ruled nothing but England and its western neighbors Ireland and Wales.¹⁶

Had Louis conquered England, the Capetians would have ruled exactly the same *imperium* that John's Angevin ancestors had assembled. John himself died of dysentery during the campaign, but his leading supporters drove out the French and established John's son Henry III on the throne for an almost sixty-year reign. Although the English would continue to assert claims to Gascony and other parts of France, and actually took much of the country during the Hundred Years War, John's debacle marked the end of a truly trans-Channel *imperium*. When later Plantagenet kings like Edward III and Henry V reconquered territory that John lost, they were perceived primarily as English conquerors, not as French magnates with legitimate claims.

Throughout much of the period between John's 1216 death and Mary I's 1558 loss of Calais—in other words, as long as English monarchs still considered themselves entitled to lands in France—writers portrayed the Angevins favorably. Ranulf Higden's assessment of Richard I was typical: the English had

¹⁶ Gillingham, *Angevin Empire*, 86–115; F. M. Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1960); W. L. Warren, *King John*, Yale English Monarchs (1961; rpt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 64–99; Ralph V. Turner, *King John* (London: Longman, 1994). See also the essays in *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999).

as much right to boast of Richard the Lion-hearted as the Greeks to boast of Alexander, the Romans of Augustus, the Bretons of Arthur, and the French of Charlemagne.¹⁷ Holinshed cited Richard ‘as a notable example to all princes’ and Speed honored him as ‘a noble prince’ who ‘showed his love and care of the English nation as also of Justice itself’.¹⁸ While medieval writers were a little more mixed in their treatment of Henry II and John, the Reformation turned both into heroes. Extirpating the cult of Thomas à Becket allowed propagandists to recuperate his murderer, Henry II, as a kind of proto-Protestant. John Bale and John Foxe honored John as a proto-Protestant martyr who suffered excommunication for his defiance of Innocent III over the appointment of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁹

But by the final years of Elizabeth’s reign—and several decades after the end of any real territorial ambitions on the Continent—admiration of the Angevins and their *imperium* yielded to contempt. Shakespeare’s contemporary Samuel Daniel condemned Richard as an absentee landlord who

exacted and consumed more of this kingdom than all his predecessors of the Normans had before him, and yet deserved less than any, having neither lived here, neither left behind him any monument of piety or any other public work, or ever showed love or care to this Commonwealth, but only to get what he could get from it.²⁰

Shakespeare’s *King John* occupies a similar transition point in Angevin historiography. As a Tudor writer, Shakespeare stops short of the anti-monarchical republicanism that informed later negative accounts of John’s career. His target is not monarchy per se, but a monarchy that privileges dynastic interests over the welfare of a new kind of political entity: English subjects imagined as members of a distinct nation. In writing *King John*, Shakespeare brought a proto-nationalist historiography to bear on a dynastic *imperium* that subsumed the linguistic and cultural divisions that, by the late sixteenth century, had become aligned with the nation-state. By centering the plot on the succession

¹⁷ *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, 9 vols (London, 1865–86), 5.336.

¹⁸ Raphael Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1807), 266; John Speed, *The Historie of Great Britain* (London, 1611), 473, 477. I am indebted to Gillingham’s excellent discussion of Angevin historiography in *Richard I*, 1–14.

¹⁹ See Carole Levin, *Propaganda in the English Reformation: Heroic and Villainous Images of King John*, *Studies in British History* 11 (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1987).

²⁰ Samuel Daniel, *The Collection of the Historie of England* (London, 1621), 101–2.

contest and John's subsequent loss of French territories, Shakespeare transformed John's story into a meta-narrative about the clash between medieval dynasticism and a nascent understanding of Europe as a set of autonomous, competing states. In losing France, John fails as a medieval dynast. But in that failure, he opens the possibility for a new England, a fiercely independent nation proudly defying its European neighbors.

This historiographical meta-narrative about England's emergence as an independent power in which politics, culture, language, and geographical space align underlies the play's notorious inconsistencies in plot and characterization. When John, the Bastard, and their other allies epitomize the dynasticism that Shakespeare anachronistically associates with a betrayal of English interests, they are villains. When they champion those interests, they are heroes. More than any other Shakespearean history, *King John* is concerned less with individual characters than with England, its integrity as a political entity, and its place within an emerging European system. As the action unfolds, characters do not mature or develop in psychologically consistent ways. But England does. It outgrows the dynasticism that Shakespeare repudiates as one of the Middle Ages' most dangerous legacies.

Whereas Foxe and Bale transformed John's story into a condemnation of the medieval Church, Shakespeare uses it to condemn medieval diplomacy. The dramatic intrigue that unfolds in Acts I–III between Eleanor of Aquitaine, Constance of Brittany, and Blanche of Castile indicts interdynastic marriages that violated the boundaries that had become significantly more aligned by the late sixteenth century with national states. The succession crisis that opens the play comes about through a kind of matrimonial excess that binds French and English, Angevin and Capetian interests together in an explosive combination. Richard I's death results in two claimants to the Angevin possessions. Eleanor of Aquitaine has one surviving son from her marriage to Henry II: John. But Arthur of Brittany, the son of John's deceased elder brother Geoffrey and Constance, also has claim. From the play's perspective, Angevin marriage diplomacy has created an *imperium* that is neither culturally, legally, nor politically coherent. Writing at times as if thirteenth-century succession principles were more stable than they actually were, Shakespeare suggests the trans-Channel titles belong by dynastic right to Arthur of Brittany. But he also suggests that Arthur is too francocentric in orientation to serve as a proper English king.

Throughout the play, the critique of interdynastic marriages manifests itself in a pervasive distrust of women as the vehicles, and sometimes the negotiating

agents of such alliances.²¹ John and Arthur appear as men excessively dominated by their respective mothers, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Constance of Brittany. As long as both women are alive, John acts primarily as the inheritor and defender of a politically unstable French territorial empire. Matters become even more confusing when he negotiates an interdynastic marriage between his niece Blanche of Castile and the Dauphin, the heir to the French throne. But after he disclaims that treaty, and after Eleanor and Constance both die, John appears in the last two acts as a legitimate defender of England itself from foreign aggression. The disappearance of all three women—Eleanor, Constance, and Blanche—complements a shift from England's initial entanglement in confusing continental alliances to its emergence as a coherent island kingdom. The play's last two acts are insistently masculinist and homosocial in their direction.²² England establishes its independence as a sovereign power with the passing of Constance and Eleanor, and of the Angevin heirs they championed, Arthur and John. When Henry III triumphs at the end of the play surrounded by his English lords, the realm has escaped French and female domination.

Katherine Eggert has identified the fantasy of a realm governed by a powerful, charismatic king as symptomatic of a larger cultural disillusionment with Elizabeth I in the final decade of her reign. While Eggert centers her discussion primarily around a reading of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *King John* concentrates the history plays' general anxieties about women's rule on the specific problem of the foreign consort. One of the traditional justifications for interdynastic marriages was that women would use their natural powers as mediators to cultivate peace between the former belligerents, their husbands' families and their own families of origin. Many historical queens fully embraced this role. Women like Marguerite d'Anjou, Isabel of Bavaria, Catherine de Medici, Henrietta Maria, and Marie Antoinette strove to foster benevolent relations

²¹ My thinking about *King John* is generally indebted to the substantial body of criticism on gender and Shakespeare's history plays. See especially Howard and Rackin's chapter on *King John* in *Engendering a Nation*, 119–33; Juliet Dusinberre, 'King John and Embarrassing Women', *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990), 37–52; Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 51–99.

²² Several scholars have commented on the disappearance of women after the third act and the sudden masculinist turn in the action. See Dusinberre, 'King John and Embarrassing Women', 51–2; Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 125–6; Virginia M. Vaughan, 'King John: A Study in Subversion and Containment', in Curren-Aquino (ed.), *New Perspectives*, 72.

between their countries of origin and the countries where they reigned as queens consort.²³ Yet the dubious reputations that many of these women earned by such efforts suggest the political risks inherent in the role. What one faction welcomed as queenly mediation, another might condemn as foreign meddling. The more seriously a queen consort acted as an agent of reconciliation, the more she might be suspected of working for the enemy.

Throughout *King John*, Shakespeare uses the personal predicaments in which Eleanor, Constance, and Blanche find themselves to register the perceived inadequacy of interdynastic marriage as a diplomatic practice. Eleanor, whose marriage to Henry II epitomized the Angevin territorial expansion, finds herself as the mother of one claimant to the Angevin-English throne, King John, and the grandmother to the other, Arthur of Brittany. Although Shakespeare might have made her preference for an English king (John) over a Breton duke (Arthur) a point of English honor, Eleanor's championship actually undermines the legitimacy of John's rule.

In the opening scene, Eleanor's behavior blurs what looks like a simple contrast between English and French claims. As long as only the male characters speak, French arrogance serves as a foil to English integrity:

KING JOHN	Now, say, Chatillion, what would France with us?	
CHATILLION	Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France In my behavior to the majesty, The borrowed majesty, of England here.	(1.1.1–4)

As King of England, John acknowledges the rights of the King of France to rule within his territory. The Chatillion, or French envoy, seems about to return the courtesy, but then snubs John with the insinuation that his 'borrowed majesty' is really usurpation. Just when the contrast between English dignity and French impertinence seems to anticipate *Henry V*, however, Eleanor's private conversation with John suggests that the French have the better case in their championship of Arthur:

KING JOHN	Our strong possession and our right for us.
ELEANOR	Your strong possession much more than your right,

²³ There is now a large body of scholarship on the 'black legends' of various medieval and early modern queens consort. See especially Helen E. Mauer, *Margaret of Anjou* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003); Lynn Hunt, 'The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution', in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 108–30.

Or else it must go wrong with you and me—
 So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
 Which none but heaven, and you, and I, shall hear. (1.1.39–43)

Eleanor uses the language of conscience, heaven, and right only to ironize them in supporting the King's strong but ethically problematic possession.

The more Eleanor speaks, the more she dissociates sympathy for John as an English king from respect for custom, law, and honor. Instead of fulfilling the traditional queenly role of mollifying hostilities, she exacerbates them. Like Lady Macbeth, Eleanor unsexes herself by helping John to destroy Arthur. The more she parodies the role of a protective mother in championing John's illegitimate claims, the more she plays a perverse, and ultimately murderous, grandmother toward Arthur. After capturing Arthur and separating him from his mother, John assures him that his 'grandam' Eleanor loves him and that he himself will cherish him as dearly as a father (3.3.3, 4). Addressing Arthur tenderly as her 'little kinsman', Eleanor then pulls him aside for a private 'word' (3.3.18). But this apparent affection is merely a screen: Eleanor distracts Arthur so that John can plot his murder with his henchman.

As villainous as Eleanor and John prove to be, Constance and Arthur are not wholly sympathetic. In terms of the proto-nationalist vision that colors Shakespeare's recreation of the Angevin past, a King of England ought to be unambiguously English. Arthur of Brittany's status as a protégé of the Capetian King of France compromises his dynastic legitimacy. Shakespeare goes out of his way to introduce this conflict between dynastic and proto-nationalist canons of legitimacy, since the historical Arthur only claimed the Angevin territories on the French side of the Channel. By casting him as a legitimate but essentially foreign heir to the English throne, Shakespeare carries dynastic logic to what in the sixteenth century seemed a nightmarish conclusion: England's possible reduction to a French satellite.

Just as one foreign mother, Eleanor, exacerbates John's tyranny, another foreign mother, Constance, undermines Arthur's credibility by embedding him in alliances with continental powers. John is corrupt and increasingly tyrannical, but Shakespeare identifies him primarily with England in his opposition to King Philip of France. Arthur may have a better claim to Angevin *imperium*, including England, but he depends completely on Philip and his imperial ally, the Duke of Austria. Constance's first lines in the play thank France's ally Austria for menacing not only John but England, imagined as a culturally and geographically independent power:

AUSTRIA That to my home I will no more return,
 Till Angiers and the right thou hast in France,
 Together with that pale, that white-faced shore,
 Whose foot spurns back the ocean's roaring tides
 And coops from other lands her islanders,
 Even till that England, hedged in with the main,
 That water-walled bulwark, still secure
 And confident from foreign purposes,
 Even till that utmost corner of the west
 Salute thee for her king...

CONSTANCE Take his mother's thanks, a widow's thanks. (2.1.21–30, 32)

To the extent that Constance pleads for her son's just dynastic inheritance, her gratitude is understandable. But Austria couches his offer of assistance to John entirely as an attack on England. Shakespeare builds Austria's description of the country with its chalk cliffs spurning 'the ocean's roaring tides' around the same isolationist topoi that he used in John of Gaunt's speech in *Richard II*. But instead of speaking as a patriotic Englishman, Austria speaks as a foreigner intent on humbling England and its fiercely independent islanders. He is determined to crush the pride with which England 'spurns back the ocean's roaring tide' and violate its 'water-walled' security. Even though Arthur has a legitimate claim to the throne, the dramatic context makes it patently clear that his kingship would reduce England to a puppet realm dominated by foreigners.

Despite all her maternal protestations, Constance of Brittany never worries that France and Austria's patronage of Arthur might ultimately deprive him independence as an English sovereign. The alacrity with which she accepts their aid suggests either that she is naive or that she shares their fundamental disregard for English liberties. The historical Constance had diplomatic and genealogical ties with Britain. Although her father Conan IV was a Breton, her mother Margaret was a Scottish cousin of Henry II. But instead of using such connections to give Constance an English aura, Shakespeare ignores them. As sympathetic as Constance becomes as the mother of a murdered son, she shows no loyalty to England, a country she has never seen.

Throughout the misogynistic opening acts of *King John*, the presence of foreign dowagers complicates an already complicated succession question by blurring thirteenth-century vocabularies of dynastic right with a sixteenth-century discourse of national honor. To the extent that the play identifies

Arthur as Richard the Lion-Hearted's heir, John is a usurper. John's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, never lets us forget that fact, and her murderous connivance heightens his stigma as a usurper. But even John's continental enemies refer to him as the King of England, in contrast to Philip of France, and in general he carries an aura of Englishness that Arthur, his Breton rival, lacks. Arthur's mother, Constance, is potentially sympathetic as the mother of a son who is eventually murdered. But her transports and outbursts of grief and fury—so loved by Victorian audiences—undercut her moral authority by suggesting female intemperance and irrationality. More importantly, she exacerbates Arthur's foreignness by encouraging his alliances with England's traditional enemies, including the man who murdered Richard the Lion-Hearted. The misogyny inherent in both Eleanor's and Constance's characterizations reinforces the play's running critique of medieval diplomatic convention. The tangle of gender, dynastic interest, and national loyalty ultimately indicts more than the meddling of two ambitious mothers. It suggests a fundamental inadequacy in the system of interdynastic marriages that established sovereign authority across the linguistic and cultural frontiers that, by the late sixteenth century, were important components of an emerging sense of the nation. *King John* develops the catch-22 choice between Arthur, a legitimate but effectively French heir, and John, an English usurper, as an inevitable consequence of the fevered dynastic politics that first created the Angevin *imperium*.

John and Philip temporarily resolve the conflict over the succession through a formal treaty epitomizing the *mélange* of national and dynastic interests that Shakespeare stigmatizes as inherently unstable. The 1200 treaty of Le Goulet developed from a plan first proposed to establish peace between Richard I and Philip II by marrying the Dauphin, the future Louis VIII, to one of Richard's Spanish nieces.²⁴ Richard died before the deal was completed, but Philip and John revived its essential features, including the Spanish marriage, a year later. Eleanor of Aquitaine journeyed to Spain to select one of her granddaughters for the match. After rejecting the elder Urracha on the grounds that her name would sound strange to northern French speakers, Eleanor settled instead on Blanche of Castile. Under the terms of the treaty, Philip acknowledged John as King of England, Duke of Normandy, Count of Anjou and Maine and all other Angevin territories on either side of the Channel. Philip also repudi-

²⁴ Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 356–64; Warren, *King John*, 54–6.

ated Arthur's claim to all territories beyond his native Brittany, which he was to hold henceforth solely as a vassal of King John. John in turn gave the Dauphin the territories of Issoudun, Graçay, and portions of Berry as a dowry for Blanche. He also surrendered the Vexin, a contested portion of Normandy, directly to Philip.

Nothing about the Treaty of Le Goulet should have prevented it from establishing peace between the belligerents, except that neither Philip nor John was fully in control of his own realm. The *langue d'oc* regions to the south were especially fractious. When the Lusignan barons of Limoges rebelled against John, they appealed to Philip for assistance, which he readily gave. The war between the French and English kings resumed, and it never really ended. John scored a few major victories, but the French finally drove the English across the Channel and later invaded England itself with the ostensible aim of assisting English rebels allegedly suffering under John's tyranny.

The Treaty of Le Goulet thus marked only a short respite in the troubles between the French and English Crowns that dated back to the reigns of Henry II and Richard I and that continued into the reign of John's son, Henry III. But in *King John*, Shakespeare rewrites Le Goulet as a major turning point in the narrative, the beginning of the end of England's territorial confusion with France.²⁵ Even within Shakespeare's fiction, the treaty initially makes both political and, at least to some extent, moral sense. An unnamed Citizen of Angiers first proposes it as a way of preventing John and Philip from destroying the city when its citizens refuse to acknowledge either Angevin claimant as its sovereign.²⁶ Up to this point in the play, the Citizen has been a sympathetic character voicing the honest quandary of the city's residents in their inability to choose between the rival claimants. Just at the point when cataclysm

²⁵ See Peter Saccio's discussion of Shakespeare's adaptation of the historical sources in *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 192–3. For more general discussion of Shakespeare's selective approach to his sources, see A. B. Braunmuller, 'King John and Historiography', *ELH* 55 (1988), 309–32.

²⁶ Although the First Folio assigns this speech to Hubert, some editors and commentators assign it instead to the Citizen who speaks for the people of Angiers throughout the scene. I tend to agree with them not only because the tenor of the speech accords with the Citizen's previous lines, but also because an unnamed Citizen of Angiers proposes the same treaty in *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (printed 1591), a play whose close relationship to Shakespeare's *King John* is a point of recurrent debate. For further discussion of the speech attribution, see A. B. Braunmuller, 'Who Is Hubert? Speech Headings in *King John*, Act II', in *Shakespeare's Speech Headings: Speaking the Speech in Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. George Walton Williams (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1997), 46–60.

seems inevitable, he introduces the possibility of an interdynastic marriage as a way of staving off disaster. Shakespeare presents the Citizen as the consummate diplomat who finds a way to mediate seemingly irreconcilable positions in the interest of 'peace and fair-faced league' (2.1.427). Even the circumstance that other writers sometimes foregrounded as the central injustice of such treaties—the bride and groom's incompatibility—fails to be a problem. The Dauphin Lewis and his Spanish-Angevin bride Blanche fall conveniently in love with each other at first sight.²⁷

Yet the Citizen's description of a negotiated settlement as 'fair-faced' league hints at a kind of hypocrisy that the play eventually stigmatizes as an inevitable component of any diplomatic exchange. Falconbridge sums it up in his role as comic chorus: 'I was never so bethumped with words' (2.1.466). The treaty-making exposes diplomacy as a kind of theater, yet another art that Shakespeare associates with the seductions and duplicity of language. As much as Shakespeare invites us to sympathize with the citizens of Angiers, their solution substitutes self-interest for a commitment to royal legitimacy. They do not care that the treaty excludes Arthur from his just inheritance; all they are interested in, albeit understandably, is their city's safety.

By exposing John, Eleanor, and even Philip's commitment to dynastic aspiration, the deal that the Citizen brokers occasions Falconbridge's paean to commodity:²⁸

FALCONBRIDGE	Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition! John, to stop Arthur's title to the whole, Hath willingly departed with a part, And France, whose armor conscience buckled on, Whom zeal and charity brought to the field As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil . . . Commodity, the bias of the world.	(2.1.561–7, 574)
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Medieval diplomatic theory upheld treaty-making as a quasi-divine intervention in human affairs with the goal of establishing the Peace of Christendom. But as Falconbridge notes, there is nothing divine about this particular treaty.

²⁷ I retain the Folio's spelling of 'Lewis' for the character that Shakespeare based on the future Louis VIII.

²⁸ See James L. Calderwood's discussion of the 'commodity' theme in 'Commodity and Honor in *King John*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 29 (1960), 341–56.

John has simply cut his losses in a vain effort to retain some French territory. Philip, who affected the play's greatest show of sanctity by pretending to be 'God's own soldier', driven by 'zeal and charity' to fight in Arthur's interest, emerges as a hypocrite. Just as much as John, he has surrendered himself to 'Commodity', the insistently secular self-interest and expedience that Falconbridge sees as the actual ground of diplomacy.

In *King John*, the treaty is immoral and politically naive. Shakespeare drastically exaggerates the amount of land that John gives away as a dowry: 'Then do I give Volquessen, Touraine, Maine, | Poitiers, and Anjou' (2.1.527–8); the historical John only ceded one of these territories, the Volquessen, or Vexin. The deal falls apart one scene later, when Philip succumbs to papal pressure to repudiate the excommunicated King of England. Even one of the few good things that the treaty accomplishes, the happy union between Blanche and Lewis, takes a disastrous turn when Blanche finds herself torn between her conflicting loyalties to the belligerents: 'Which is the side that I must go withal? . . . | Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose' (3.1.327, 335). She cannot be faithful to her French husband, Lewis, without betraying her English uncle John, and she cannot support her uncle without violating the integrity of her marriage.

Blanche's predicament exactly mirrors that of the citizens of Angiers. Like them, she cannot side unambiguously with either side of the quarrel. In short, the treaty fails to resolve anything.²⁹ Unlike Eleanor and Constance, the younger Blanche does not appear as a meddling, domineering mother. But even as misogyny yields to pathos, Shakespeare continues to develop his critique of interdynastic marriage as a basis of European statecraft. The play's few innocent characters, like Blanche and the citizens of Angiers, find themselves trapped as pawns between the rival powers. Blanche's tragedy in particular suggests that traditional diplomacy is not only corrupt, hypocritical, and ineffectual, but also destructive in its impact on the men and women whose lives are brokered by unscrupulous dynasts. The predicament in which Blanche finds herself serves as a synecdoche for the dangers inherent in the marital diplomacy that first brought about the Angevin confusion of French and English interests. The old dynastic, trans-Channel *imperium* denied its subjects the possibility of full political and even psychological coherence by

²⁹ See Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 124.

demanding loyalty to sovereigns, and sometimes even multiple sovereigns, whose aspirations did not coincide with their subjects' own welfare.

The treaty's failure signals the beginning of John's collapse and the end of the Angevin *imperium*. Having given up the Angevin heartlands of Maine, Anjou, and Touraine, John soon finds himself driven out of France altogether and retreating to England. His murder of Arthur is a pyrrhic victory, since the crime so alienates him from his English subjects that they rebel against him and encourage a French invasion to expel him from the throne.

In terms of the play's central paradox, however, the invasion also allows John at last to appear as an unambiguously English king rather than as a trans-Channel dynast. Instead of compromising England's independence through treaties with Frenchmen, he and his retainers find themselves fighting to preserve England itself. The Dauphin Lewis is no Henry Bolingbroke. In swearing allegiance to him, Salisbury, Pembroke, and the other rebels betray not only their king but their country. If they placed the Dauphin on the English throne, he would eventually rule a Capetian *imperium* that mirrored its Angevin predecessor and reproduced its instabilities. Once more, one man would find himself in the impossible position of heading a vast collection of kingdoms, duchies, counties, and provinces on both sides of the Channel with no common linguistic, cultural, or political traditions. Once again, the only basis for such a conglomeration of polities would be the fortunes of interdynastic marriage. As Lewis himself proclaims, 'I, by the honor of my marriage bed, | After young Arthur, claim this land for mine' (5.2.93–4). The only thing that might justify his *de facto* annexation of England to the French throne is his marriage to Blanche, a Spanish woman descended from an Angevin king. His ambitions carry the logic of interdynastic marriage to its conclusion: a French seizure of the English throne.

The proto-nationalist language dominating the play's final acts suppresses the fact that the men occupying the English throne since the Conquest were arguably more French than English. This convenient amnesia establishes an anachronistic distinction between the components of John's realm on opposite sides of the Channel. Surrendering Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and the Vexin might have been a strategic error and even a humiliation, but it left English sovereignty—imagined as something that both embraces and transcends the personal authority of the English monarchy—intact. The same would not be true if Lewis were to take England itself. Shakespeare imagines that as an ultimate national catastrophe that would surpass anything yet suffered under John's incompetent and tyrannical regime.

In warding off the invasion, Falconbridge and the other Angevin supporters appear less as John's partisans and more as defenders of an English nation imagined as entirely distinct from the Angevin *imperium*. When Falconbridge confronts Lewis and the papal emissary Pandulph, his predictions of an English victory anticipate the full-bodied patriotism of *Henry V*:

FALCONBRIDGE Shall that victorious hand be feeble here
 That in your chambers gave you chastisement?
 No! Know the gallant monarch is in arms,
 And like an eagle o'er his aerie towers
 To souse annoyance that comes near his nest. (5.2.146–50)

Falconbridge uses hyperbole and sharp antitheses to augment the force of his boast: what could be more tactically futile than a French assault on English soil, since John has punished the French not just on French soil, but in the private chambers of their own homes? The language is so charged that it skirts over the fact that John has shown no evidence of valor. Just when did his 'victorious hand' chastise the French in their own chambers? That might have been said of the historical John after his success at the battle of Mirabeau, but that was an unusual bright spot in a dismal military career.³⁰ In Shakespeare's version, Mirabeau matters primarily as the site of Arthur's capture. The boy-duke's subsequent murder rests uneasily beside Falconbridge's paternal image of John as an eagle protecting its nest. But such objections matter little in the face of a French invasion. What Falconbridge offers is less an accurate recollection of John's reign than a celebration of him as an embodiment of England's independence as a sovereign nation.

Falconbridge, in fact, must work hard to keep John from spoiling the patriotic fantasy.³¹ In return for the promise of a negotiated peace, for example, John surrenders his crown to Pandulph and then receives it back again as a token that he holds his 'sovereign greatness and authority' from the Pope (5.1.4). Falconbridge repudiates this gesture and its implications of a sovereignty contingent on papal favor:

³⁰ Warren, *King John*, 76–84.

³¹ See Williams' complementary reading of Falconbridge as 'a figure of exogamous hybridity' whose 'vocabulary of conquest ... [ties his] conception closely to England's history with France, and underscore the general difficulty in articulating an English identity that is not overshadowed by conquest' (*The French Fetish*, 205, 202–3).

FALCONBRIDGE

O inglorious league!
 Shall we, upon the footing of our land,
 Send fair-play orders and make compromise
 Insinuation, parley, and base truce
 To arms invasive? Shall a beardless boy,
 A cockered silken wanton, brave our fields
 And flesh his spirit in a warlike soil
 Mocking the air with colors idly spread,
 And find no check? (5.1.65–73)

In yet another burst of familiar Elizabethan jingoism, Falconbridge spurns the papal legate and the effeminate French alike for insulting a warlike English nation. Like similar passages elsewhere in Shakespeare's histories and other Elizabethan plays, the speech opts for war over peace in strikingly gendered language that discredits anything short of an ultimate military victory as a failure of English masculinity.

Falconbridge's militarism finally carries the day. After a monk conveniently poisons John, England is freed from feminine and effeminate influences and can bask in the wholly masculine authority of Henry III. Henry inherits only a fraction of his father's original *imperium*, but nobody minds. In proclaiming that 'England never did, nor never shall, | Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror' unless it somehow betrays itself, Falconbridge ends the play on a cautiously triumphant note. What anxiety he might have about the future centers on England's internal welfare and not its pretensions to a continental *imperium*. John's French losses are his son's gain. Freed from the encumbrances of a French apanage, Henry III is a wholly English king whose relationship to the Continent is military and defensive. Shakespeare never mentions his French mother Isabelle d'Angoulême, or the fact that John's courtship of her triggered a major revolt among his French barons. Nor does he say anything about Henry's *langue d'oc* wife Eleanor of Provence or about the Savoyard and Lusignan relatives who dominated his court. Shakespeare writes instead as if John's reign marked an absolute separation of French and English interests that created England's national sovereignty.

King John thus transforms the political tragedy of the last Angevin king into an etiology for England's place within a European community of nation-states. From the play's perspective, England's greatness depends on its insularity. It must remain both militarily and diplomatically impregnable, 'That water-walled bulwark, still secure | And confident from foreign purposes',

whose fierce independence the Duke of Austria and other French partisans so bitterly resent. If this popular diplomatic vision radically rewrote the medieval history that Shakespeare encountered in Holinshed and other Tudor chronicles, it also projected an interpretation of contemporary politics that rested uneasily beside Elizabeth's foreign policy, especially for the first two-thirds of her reign. She was finally no more fully 'confident from foreign purposes' than the historical Henry III. Although she gradually accepted the loss of Calais, she had opened her diplomatic career at Cateau-Cambrésis with a desperate effort to retain it. Over the next several decades, she entered into serious negotiations to establish an alliance with France based on yet another Anglo-French marriage, the exact kind of interdynastic union that, according to Shakespeare, had entangled French and English interests throughout the Middle Ages.

Those marriages failed to come about, possibly more through diplomatic chance than through monarchical deliberation. But by the time *King John* was first staged and Elizabeth was in her last decade, she had accepted the role of the fiercely independent Virgin Queen and escaped the xenophobic misogyny that the play concentrates on Eleanor of Aquitaine and Constance of Brittany. In *King John*, women must disappear before Henry III can step into his role as an uncompromised defender of English interests, because they are all foreign consorts binding England's destiny to continental intrigues. In order for Elizabeth to maintain the good will of Shakespeare and his audience, she did not have to disappear, but she did have to ward off the contaminating legacy of Eleanor of Aquitaine and other medieval queens. In the process, Shakespeare and his queen gave birth to the possibility of a modern European state system, in which countries would no longer relate to each other as branches of an extended dynastic family but as independent sovereign states. It would take a series of European civil wars and revolutions before that model could be fully established throughout the Continent, but Elizabeth's reign and Shakespeare's theater of state mark an important moment in its prehistory.

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PART II

MEDIEVALISM IN
SHAKESPEAREAN ENGLAND

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5

The Voice of the Author in 'The Phoenix and Turtle'

Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser

Patrick Cheney

'Let this duncified worlde esteeme of Spenser and Chaucer, I'll worship
sweet Mr. Shakespere.'

—*The Return from Parnassus, Part 1* (1600)¹

To specify the connection between Shakespeare and the Middle Ages, we might turn to one of the defining *medieval moments* of the Elizabethan era. In Book 4, canto 2, of the 1596 *Faerie Queene*, England's New Poet, Edmund Spenser, pronounces himself the national heir to the Old Poet, 'Dan Chaucer, well of English undefiled' (4.2.32):

Then pardon, O most sacred happie spirit,
That I thy labours lost may thus revive,

¹ *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book: A Collection of Allusions to Shakspeare from 1591 to 1700*, ed. C. M. Ingleby, L. Toulmin Smith, and F. J. Furnivall; rev. edn John Munro; pref. Edmund Chambers, 2 vols (1909; rpt. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 1:68. Quotations from Chaucer come from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton, 1987). Quotations from Spenser come from *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and Ernest De Sélincourt, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909–10). The i–j and u–v have been modernized in all relevant early modern texts, as have other early modern typographical conventions, such as the italicizing of names and places.

And steale from thee the meede of thy due merit,
 That none durst ever whilest thou wast alive,
 And being dead in vaine yet many strive:
 Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweete
 Of thine owne spirit, which doth in me survive,
 I follow here the footing of thy feete,
 That with thy meaning so I may the rather meete.² (4.2.34)

In this self-conscious apostrophe to a 'dead' author, Spenser identifies the principle by which he will 'revive' Chaucer's 'labours lost'—a principle he calls 'infusion'. Through the 'sweete' process of infusion, he will mystically receive the *surviving* 'spirit' of Chaucer, and through this transfer of spiritual power he will 'follow' the 'footing' of the old poet's 'feete', so that he can 'meete' Chaucer's 'meaning' and thus continue his immortalizing fame.³

Moreover, according to the New Poet, the principle of infusion differs from other principles of literary relation being used at that time to claim status as Chaucer's heir. During Chaucer's lifetime, Spenser says, no one could 'meete' Chaucer, even though after the great poet's death 'many' 'strive' in 'vaine'. The word 'strive' presumably refers to a process of futile labor unauthorized by Chaucer himself, who consents only to transfer his surviving inner form effortlessly and sweetly to Edmund Spenser. As Craig A. Berry points out, Spenser 'replaces filiation as begetting with filiation as spiritual infusion—a more flexible, and thus, safer imitative strategy for a poet who wants to be identified with a famous predecessor

² Spenser had begun the process of reviving Chaucer in his 1579 pastoral, *The Shepheardes Calender*, where the opening and closing poems, 'To His Booke' and the Envoy, both imitate *Troilus and Criseyde*, while three eclogues (*Februarie, June, December*) include Chaucer in the *fiction* of the poem. The glossator of this volume, 'E.K.' (no doubt Spenser himself in collusion with Gabriel Harvey), calls Chaucer 'the olde famous Poete' (*Dedicatory Epistle* 7–8) and Spenser the 'new Poete' (6).

³ That poetic immortality is at stake in Spenser's revival of Chaucer's spirit is clear in such words as 'survive', but see also the preceding stanzas for Chaucer as 'that renowned Poet' of national epic who has 'compiled | ...warlike numbers and Heroic sound, ... | On Fames eternall beadroll worthie to be fyled' (4.2.32). Recurrently, Spenser places Chaucer within the context of fame, as in the very first reference: 'Uncouth the unkiste, Sayde the olde famous Poet Chaucer' (*Dedicatory Epistle* 7–8). E.K.'s quoted Chaucerian phrase comes from *Troilus and Criseyde* 1.809, and his subsequent discussion reveals how the state of being unknown and unkissed signals the oblivious alternative to 'the tromp of fame' (*Dedicatory Epistle* 23).

for support in facing a potentially doubting audience—but at the same time finds it necessary to distance himself from some of that predecessor's dubious associations.⁴

Contemporaries immediately recognized Spenser as the heir of Chaucer, interpreting the genealogy as a triumphal moment of literary succession. In the words of Thomas Speght from his 1598 edition of Chaucer,

In his *Faerie Queene* in his discourse of friendship, as thinking himself most worthy to be Chaucers friend, for his like naturall disposition that Chaucer had, hee sheweth that none that lived with him, nor none that came after him, durst presume to revive Chaucers lost labours in that unperfite tale of the Squire, but only himself: which he had not done, had he not felt (as he saith) the infusion of Chaucers owne sweet spirite, surviving within him.⁵

Repeatedly during Shakespeare's lifetime, contemporaries linked the New with the Old Poet, from Gabriel Harvey in 1580–93 (49, 50, 55), William Camden in 1600 (114), I.F. also in 1600 (105), Charles Fitzgeoffrey in 1601 (109, 111), and Michael Drayton in 1605 (79), to William Warner in 1606 (113), Thomas Dekker in 1607 (122), Thomas Norden in 1614 (130), and Ben Jonson in 1616 (135). According to Dekker, 'Grave Spencer was no sooner entred into this Chappell of Apollo, but these elder Fathers of the Divine Furie, gave him a Lawrer & sung his Welcome: Chaucer call'de him his Sonne, and plac'de him at his right hand' (122). Effectively, Dekker replaces Spenser's principle of 'filiation as infusion' with the more familiar principle of 'filiation as begetting'. Spenser's

⁴ Craig A. Berry, "'Sundrie Doubts': Vulnerable Understanding and Dubious Origins in Spenser's Completion of the Squire's Tale', in *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance*, ed. Theresa M. Krier (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1998), 106–27, esp. 108. Berry emphasizes the 'doubts' Spenser's verbal complexity raises about 'literary inheritance' (115) and discusses the Elizabethan anxiety over Chaucer as a national poet, in Sidney and others (108, 113–14). Spenser's apostrophe to Chaucer has received extended analysis: Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981); Patrick Cheney, 'Spenser's Completion of *The Squire's Tale*: Love, Magic, and Heroic Action in the Legend of Cambell and Triamond', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985), 135–55; Carol A.N. Martin, 'Authority and the Defense of Fiction: Renaissance Poetics and Chaucer's *House of Fame*', in Krier (ed.), *Refiguring Chaucer*, 40–65; and Theresa M. Krier, 'Orality and Chaucerian Textuality in *The Faerie Queene* IV.i-iii: Spenser's Quest for Mothers to Think Back Through', paper presented at the conference of the Modern Language Association (San Francisco, CA, 2001).

⁵ Rpt. in *Spenser: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. M. Cummings (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 98–9. Subsequent parenthetical citations in this paragraph come from this volume.

inheritance of the title 'English National Poet' from Chaucer remains one of our most durable authorial genealogies, as testified to by the voluminous commentary in the centuries following.⁶

Yet the epigraph to the present essay intimates something else—something not charted by recent criticism. Around the turn from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries, writers began to link Shakespeare with Spenser, to place Shakespeare in the company of both the Old and the New Poet, and to see Shakespeare as the successor to both.⁷ In the 1600 *Return from Parnassus*, Part 1, the anonymous Cambridge University authors present a character named Gull choosing to let 'this duncified worlde esteeme of Spenser and Chaucer', while he 'worship[s] sweet Mr. Shakespere'. However ludicrous this choice appears in the context of the theatrical satire, it speaks to a new phenomenon in the discourse of the period. In Gull's turn from the Old and the New Poet to Shakespeare, we can witness the comedic passing of a literary torch that will prove serious in subsequent centuries.

After publication of the 1596 *Faerie Queene*, I propose, it would be difficult for any poet concerned with authorial genealogy and literary history to confront Chaucer directly, without going first through Spenser. I further propose that Shakespeare understood this Spenserian genealogy, and made it the center of his intertextual method when re-working Chaucerian poems.⁸

⁶ Paradoxically, we possess no book-length study of Spenser and Chaucer, but see A. Kent Hieatt, *Chaucer, Spenser, Milton: Mythopoeic Continuities and Transformations* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1975). Krier in *Refiguring Chaucer* supplies a recent and full bibliography for Chaucer in the Renaissance more broadly, including Spenser. The standard monograph remains Alice Miskimin, *The Renaissance Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975).

⁷ In 'Shakespeare's Sonnet 106, Spenser's National Epic, and Counter-Petrarchism', *English Literary Renaissance* 31 (2001), 331–64, I survey commentary on the Shakespeare–Spenser connection from the sixteenth through the twenty-first centuries.

⁸ This critical principle remains understudied, playing no part in the major books on Shakespeare and Chaucer: Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1978); and E. Talbot Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985). Still, we may find evidence of the principle's operation. For instance, James P. Bednarz, 'Imitations of Spenser in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Renaissance Drama* 14 (1983), 79–102, sees Shakespeare using Spenser to mediate Chaucer in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Bednarz remarks, Bottom's dream shares a 'common literary genealogy' with Arthur's dream of Gloriana in Book I, canto 9, of *The Faerie Queene*, and both have their 'common source' in Sir Thopas' dream in *The Canterbury Tales* (100–1): 'Shakespeare returns [Chaucer's]... dream of Sir Thopas to its original low mimetic register, deflating Spenser's elevation, but their dreams were subjected to similar pressures and inevitably ended in the same perplexity' (101).

The *second* most famous articulation linking Shakespeare with Spenser and Chaucer comes from William Basse in 1622:

Renowned Spenser lye a thought more nye
To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lye
A little nearer Spenser to make roome
For Shakespeare in your threefold, fowerfold Tombe.⁹

In this strategy of literary commendation, Basse tries to create 'roome' for Shakespeare in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, next to the monuments of Chaucer, Spenser, and 'rare Beaumont'.

A year later, in the most famous linking of Shakespeare with Spenser and Chaucer, Jonson alludes to Basse in his memorial poem to the First Folio, yet chooses to back a different strategy of memorialization:

My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
A little further, to make thee a roome:
Thou art a Moniment, without a tombe,
And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live.¹⁰

Jonson does not need to lodge 'Shakespeare' by either the Old Poet or the New in Poets' Corner because the 'Booke' of the First Folio is a sufficient 'Moniment' to keep Shakespeare's 'art alive still'. Like Basse, nonetheless, Jonson joins in the cultural process of trying to immortalize Shakespeare in terms of Spenser and Chaucer.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the genealogy linking the three authors forms the foundation for the English literary canon, as exhibited in 1664 by Knightly Chetwood:

Such was the case when Chaucer's early toyl
Founded the Muses Empire in our Soyl.
Spencer improv'd it with his painful hand
But lost a Noble Muse in Fairy-land.
Shakespeare stay'd all that Nature cou'd impart.¹¹

Like Jonson, Basse, and the *Parnassus* plays, Chetwood anticipates (we shall see) Shakespeare's own strategy of bringing his authorship into alignment with the

⁹ *Shakspeare Allusion-Book*, 1: 286.

¹⁰ 'To the Memory of my Beloved, the Author', 19–23; rpt. *Riverside Shakespeare*, 97.

¹¹ *Shakspeare Allusion-Book*, 2: 304.

Old and New Poet. In an uncanny way, then, Gull gets the authorial genealogy right. Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, with their great successor Milton (rather than rare Beaumont), function as the cornerstones of the English canon for the ensuing centuries.¹²

In working specifically from a *typological* principle linking Spenser with Chaucer, Shakespeare could have taken the cue of Spenser himself. In *The Shepheardes Calender*, the New Poet calls Chaucer ‘Tityrus’, the name that Virgil had selected for his pastoral persona in the Eclogues. Complexly, Spenser writes Virgil’s pastoral achievement into Chaucer, so that by ‘Tityrus’ he means something like *Chaucer in comparison with Virgil*.¹³ Nowhere is the pre-Miltonic version of this history on more concentrated display than in a work that John Middleton Murray once called ‘the most perfect short poem in any language’ and I. A. Richards ‘the most mysterious poem in English’: ‘The Phoenix and Turtle’.¹⁴

As a key intertext for ‘The Phoenix and Turtle’, critics have long proposed Chaucer’s *Parlement of Foules*, yet today most do not find the intertextuality significant enough to warrant a role in the critical conversation.¹⁵ The dearth of commentary on the two poems is unfortunate, because the similarities afford a new vantage point for viewing two literary giants who link the Middle Ages and the early modern period: what we might call the intertextual politics of authorship and literary form. Indeed, both poems use the author’s first-person

¹² For recent commentary on this version of the canon, see Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 1.

¹³ For details on this typological principle, see Cheney, ‘“Novells of his devise”: Chaucerian and Virgilian Career Paths in Spenser’s *Februarie Eclogue*’, in *European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Cheney and Frederick A. de Armas (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002), 231–67.

¹⁴ As Colin Burrow explains in his edition of Shakespeare’s poems, this title ‘was first used in 1807, and has no connection with Shakespeare’ (*William Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 82). Even though Burrow prefers to title the poem after its first line, ‘Let the bird of loudest lay’, I use the more conventional title here. For Middleton Murray, see *A New Variorum Shakespeare: The Poems*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1938), 566; for Richards, see *Poetries: Their Media and Ends*, ed. Trevor Eaton (The Netherlands: Mouton, 1974), 50.

¹⁵ Long ago, Arthur H. R. Fairchild, in ‘*The Phoenix and Turtle: A Critical and Historical Interpretation*’, *Englische Studien* 33 (1904), 337–84, detailed the similarities between the two poems, but more recent critics like Thompson dismiss them, since they provide only ‘a valuable illustration of one of the ways in which [Shakespeare’s work] is deeper and richer than other writers: his powers of association are complex and daring’ (Thompson, *Shakespeare’s Chaucer*, 218).

voice, rely on the medieval convention of the bird poem, and do so allegorically. Both feature an assembly of birds and include a familiar literary convention, the bird catalogue. And both poems focus on the topic of love, use an avian gender dynamic to probe the heterosexual relation between male and female, and thus foreground the importance of chastity and mutuality between the sexes. Moreover, for both poems, critics suspect a deep allegory that addresses the politics of royal marriage, however obliquely each might negotiate it.

Recognizing the similarities between the two poems, we also need to register notable differences. Most obviously perhaps, 'Phoenix' differs from *Parlement* in the circumstance prompting the avian assembly. In Chaucer's poem, the birds convene on Saint Valentine's Day at Dame Nature's bower to participate in the annual ritual of mate-choosing, while in Shakespeare's poem the birds assemble to mourn the deaths of two birds, the phoenix and turtle, who have married but left no posterity. The formal features of the two poems also differ. Chaucer pens a 699-line narrative dream vision in Middle English, regularized through rhyme royal stanzas in an iambic pentameter line. In contrast, Shakespeare pens a 67-line philosophical lyric in modern English with two stanzaic structures, each in a different meter: thirteen four-line stanzas rhyming *abba* in the unusual meter of 'a seven-syllable line with four evenly-spaced accents'¹⁶ or what Barbara Everett terms 'broken trochaics', followed by five tercets in a similar meter.¹⁷ The details of Chaucer's long poem are so extensive, and of Shakespeare's short poem so concentrated, that it is easy to understand why critics have dismissed the relation between the two as unrewarding. Yet recent work on authorship and intertextuality makes a return to this literary relation at the center of English literary history both timely and productive.¹⁸

Chaucer's poem opens with a fiction about the author reading a book, Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*. After falling asleep, the poet dreams that Scipio Africanus takes him for a walking tour through the Garden of Love and into the Temple of Venus, where they witness a parliament of birds assembling for the ritual of Saint

¹⁶ William H. Matchett, 'The Phoenix and the Turtle': *Shakespeare's Poem and Chester's Loves Martyr* (London: Mouton, 1965), 34.

¹⁷ Barbara Everett, 'Set upon a Golden Bough to Sing: Shakespeare's Debt to Sidney in "The Phoenix and Turtle"', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 February 2001, 14.

¹⁸ For a recent overview essay, see Wendy Wall, 'Authorship and the Material Conditions of Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1500–1600*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 64–89, which foregrounds the role that Spenser and Jonson (but not Shakespeare) play in founding modern English authorship.

Valentine's Day. Three tersel eagles debate who will win the formel eagle sitting on Dame Nature's wrist. In the end, however, Nature wisely lets the formel choose her own mate: 'she hireself shal han hir eleccioun, | Of whom hire lest; whoso be wroth or blythe, | Hym that she cheest, he shal hire han as swithe' (621–3). Yet in her response the formel asks for a year in which to make her decision: 'Iaxe respit for to avise me, | And after that to have my choys al fre' (648–9). Free from the pressures of masculine competition, she locates the authority for her choice solely within herself: 'I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide' (652). With this judgment, Dame Nature allows 'To every foul... his make | By evene accord' (667–8). Before the birds scatter, however, and in accord with Nature's rite, a few 'synge a roundel... | To don Nature honour and plesaunce' (675–6). The joyous 'shoutyng' (693) that succeeds the roundel awakens the author from his dream, prompting him to take up 'othere bokes... | To reede upon' (695–6).

Chaucer critics have long tried to decipher this avian allegory, and today most believe that the poem has political import, but they remain divided over which historical marriage Chaucer addresses. Most readings argue that the poem refers to the marriage of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia on January 14, 1382, when Richard rivaled two continental suitors, Friedrich of Meissen and Charles VI of France. The formel has also been identified as Philippa of Lancaster and the tercels as Richard, William of Hainault, and John of Blois. Perhaps the formel is even Princess Marie of France.¹⁹

While recognizing an *occasional* origin to the *Parlement of Foules*, we might turn alternatively to a feature of the poem that we can map more certainly: the poem's clear three-part structure.²⁰ Recently, Theresa Krier has suggested that each part figures a 'different literary region': part 1, in which Chaucer reads the Ciceronian dream book, figures what Krier calls the 'Latinate, philosophical realm'; part 2, in which the poet visits the Garden of Love and Temple of Venus to

¹⁹ For details and references, see the *Riverside Chaucer*, 94. Critics have pursued various paths of interpretation. On more social dynamics of the *Parlement*, often linking politics with desire, see Bruce Kent Cowgill, 'The *Parlement of Foules* and the Body Politic', *Journal of English and German Philology* 74 (1975), 315–35; Paul Olson, 'The *Parlement of Foules*: Aristotle's *Politics* and the Foundations of Human Society', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 2 (1980), 53–69; Russell Peck, 'Love, Politics, and Plot in the *Parlement of Foules*', *Chaucer Review* 24 (1990), 290–305; and Craig E. Bertolet, '"My wit is sharpe; I love no taryng": Urban Poetry and the *Parlement of Foules*', *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996), 365–89.

²⁰ See Robert Worth Frank, Jr., 'Structure and Meaning in the *Parlement of Foules*', *PMLA* 71 (1956), 530–9.

witness the Saint Valentine's Day ritual, figures 'late-medieval, vernacular, courtly love poetry'; and part 3, in which Chaucer dreams that the birds sing the roundel only to be awakened by the subsequent shouting, figures lyric song.²¹ Krier adds that in the fiction of *Love's Labor's Lost* Shakespeare appropriates Chaucer's poem, its three-part structure, and its final event, presenting a female who defers the choice in marriage for a year, in order to represent a generic move from comedy to lyric: 'Shakespeare contemplates his place as dramatist in poetic genre history: he opens a space which the catalogues demarcate as specifically literary.'²²

Krier's work on the 'literary' nature of the intertextual linkage between *Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Parlement of Foules* has significant repercussions for interpreting the intertextual linkage between *Parlement* and 'Phoenix' (a work that Krier does not mention). For, in this lyric, readers also confront an opaque avian allegory that many interpret as political in orientation. For a long line of distinguished commentators—from Emerson in the nineteenth century to Everett in the twenty-first—the mystery results because the allegory appears to bedevil the poem's formal beauty. As with Chaucer's poem, a long list of contenders for the historical identities of the avian principles has emerged. As with Chaucer, too, one couple has received the most sustained support: the phoenix and turtle represent Queen Elizabeth and the earl of Essex.²³ While such a political

²¹ Theresa M. Krier, *Birth Passages: Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), 112–13.

²² Krier, *Birth Passages*, 142–3; her emphasis. Robert R. Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1989), sees the *Parlement* as a commentary on the craft of writing poetry; while David Aers, 'The *Parlement of Foules*: Authority, the Knower, and the Known', *Chaucer Review* 16 (1981), 1–17, argues that Chaucer privileges his own authority as an author over other cultural and literary figures.

²³ Other candidates include Sir John Salisbury and his wife Ursula; Elizabeth and the English people; Elizabeth and Salisbury; Lucy, countess of Bedford, and her husband, the third earl of Bedford; Elizabeth and Giordano Bruno; the martyred Jesuit poets Robert Southwell and Henry Walpole; and the martyred Catholic Ann Line and her husband, Roger. For criticism on these candidates, including Emerson, who first thought the poem an allegory of the poet, see Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), chap. 6, to which the present essay serves as sequel. For two excellent overview essays, see James P. Bednarz, 'The Passionate Pilgrim and "The Phoenix and Turtle"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Poetry*, ed. Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 108–24; and Lynn Enterline, 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', Renaissance Elegies, and the Language of Grief', in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*, ed. Patrick Cheney, Andrew Hadfield, and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 147–59.

tenor may operate, it does not fully account for the poem's remarkable *poetic* quality. What Shakespeare's lyric, like Chaucer's narrative poem, seems to require is an interpretive strategy that can wed the political to the literary.

We can discover such a strategy by viewing 'The Phoenix and Turtle', like *The Parlement of Foules*, as a poem about the politics of authorship. According to this view, Shakespeare's lyric deploys an intertextual strategy that invents a new literary form. Significantly, 'The Phoenix and Turtle' also has a clear three-part structure, marked by formal indicators in the text. This structure, I suggest, foregrounds the voice of the author in the creation of poetic form. In stanzas 1–5, the poet-narrator uses his lyric voice to call the birds to their funeral assembly. Then, in stanzas 6–13 this lyric voice records a second voice, the collaborative one of the avian choir singing a funeral anthem, as indicated by the transitional line between parts 1 and 2: 'Here the anthem doth commence' (21). Finally, in stanzas 14–18 a figure in the fiction of the anthem, named 'Reason' (41), steps forward to speak in yet a third voice, rehearsing a miniature Greek tragedy about the ill-fated deaths of the phoenix and turtle—this time marked in the text by the title 'Threnos' separating stanzas 13 and 14.

As in *The Parlement of Foules*, in 'The Phoenix and Turtle' the three-part structure represents a poetic voice in the process of inventing literary form. In Shakespeare, however, the poetic voice does not remain singular, as it does in Chaucer, nor does it simply progress from one 'literary region' to another. Rather, it *modulates* from one voice *into* another, in a telescoping fashion: from the singularity of the poet's own first-person voice, to the collaborative voice of the funeral lament within the poet's fiction, to the singular dramatic voice of a character within the choir's (and poet's) fiction. I can think of no other classical, medieval, or early modern poem that does precisely this.²⁴ Momentously, Shakespeare imprints a lyric poem about the birds' deaths not by *clarifying* the singular autonomy of the author's voice but by *displacing* it. In the process, he

²⁴ The uniqueness of what Shakespeare attempts here helps explain C. Burrow's conclusion: 'Shakespeare's poem is clearly pushing in the direction of an innovative and abstract poetic vocabulary. . . . His poem feels as though it is coming from another world, and as though it grows from thinking, and thinking gravely, about sacrifice in love, and about where Elizabethan poetry might move next. But the difficulty of attaching his poem to particular circumstances may partly derive from the work which it is attempting to achieve: to keep the name of Shakespeare alive and to keep it associated with new forms' (*Complete Sonnets and Poems*, 89–90). For support, see Everett, 'Set upon A Golden Bough', 13–14; and Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (London: Allen Lane-Penguin, 2000), ix, 69–71.

constructs what may be the most self-reflexive representation of authorship in his canon.

The paradox of an authorial voice *clarified yet displaced* results, I argue, because Shakespeare lets collide the two major English models of authorship then available: *Chaucerian self-effacement* and *Spenserian self-crowning*. Both of these models are well known and can be explained quickly. In Book 3 of *The House of Fame*, the definitive Chaucerian moment occurs, when the poet refuses to record his name. ‘“Frend,”’ asks Aeolus of Chaucer himself, ‘“what is thy name? | Artow come hider to han fame?”’ | “Nay, for sothe, frend,”’ says the poet, ‘“I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy, | For no such cause, by my hed!”’ (1871–5).²⁵ Like Dante before him, Chaucer presents himself as a character in the fiction. Yet in *The Canterbury Tales* he presents himself as a minor character, showing up at the back of the pilgrimage, and eventually narrating a self-mocking romance, *The Tale of Sir Thopas*. In the narrative poems, Chaucer does foreground himself as the primary character, yet in *The House of Fame* he presents himself as humbly rejecting self-identification, producing a fiction in which his name is left blank and his identity held in question. Cunningly, Chaucer’s strategy for securing literary fame works through a fiction that rejects the quest for fame.²⁶

In contrast, Spenser is our great poet of self-crowning. As Richard Helgerson argues, he is Renaissance England’s ‘first laureate poet’, and deploys strategies of self-presentation within his works to crown himself as national poet.²⁷ Thus, in Book 4, canto 2, of *The Faerie Queene*, when interrupting the narrative to identify himself as Chaucer’s heir, Spenser pens perhaps his most conspicuous moment of laureate self-crowning.

Like Spenser, Shakespeare is well known to have engaged Chaucer throughout his career, from *Love’s Labor’s Lost* to *Troilus and Cressida* to *Two Noble Kinsmen*.²⁸ Unlike Spenser, however, Shakespeare never claims to participate in the

²⁵ Thanks to Robert R. Edwards for this reference (personal communication).

²⁶ On Chaucer as ‘the poet of indirection’, see Robert R. Edwards, ‘Ricardian Dreamwork: Chaucer, Cupid, and Loyal Lovers’, in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 59–82. On Chaucer’s deviation from the conventional view of poetic fame and immortality, esp. as evinced in Dante, see Patrick Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), 8–9, 16–17; and, more recently, Martin, ‘Authority and the Defense of Fiction’.

²⁷ Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 100. Helgerson’s view of Spenser as England’s first laureate poet has long been standard in the field.

²⁸ Donaldson, *Swan at the Well*; and Thompson, *Shakespeare’s Chaucer*.

process Spenser calls 'infusion sweete'. This process is Pythagorean in origin, and for Spenser it derives from the Ovidian principle of metempsychosis in Book 15 of the *Metamorphoses*.²⁹ Yet in 1598 Francis Meres appropriates Spenser's self-advertised Ovidian metempsychosis to describe Shakespeare's authorial relation with Ovid himself: 'As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagorus: so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous & hony-tongued Shakespeare, witnes his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugred Sonnets among his private friends, &c.'³⁰ As Jonathan Bate remarks, Meres' allusion to 'the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*'—where Euphorbus' soul survives in Pythagorus—is precise, since 'Pythagorean metempsychosis . . . becomes a figure for the translation of one poet into another.'³¹ Spiritual translation wittily metamorphoses into authorial translation, the migration of one author's spirit into another. Thus, in the Legend of Friendship, when Spenser pauses to address Chaucer, he does not simply deploy Ovidian translation, but consolidates his authorial succession in English literary history. He completes Chaucer's unfinished *Squire's Tale* with a narrative that itself represents the authorial process of 'infusion sweete'. In his completion of Chaucer's tale, Spenser calls this process 'traduction' (4.3.13).³²

The word 'traduction' has four primary meanings pertinent here. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it can mean:

- 1) 'Conveyance from one place to another; bringing over, transportation, transference';
- 2) 'Translation into another language';
- 3) 'Transmission by generation to offspring or posterity; production, propagation; derivation from ancestry, descent'; and
- 4) '(rendering L. *traductio*.) A rhetorical figure consisting in the repetition of a word (or its derivatives) for some particular effect.'

In other words, traduction can refer to geographical travel, to linguistic translation, to genealogical transmission, or to verbal repetition. While the

²⁹ On Spenser's deep intertextual dialogue with Ovid, see Syrithe Pugh, *Spenser and Ovid* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); on Spenser and Ovid's Pythagoras, see 114–23.

³⁰ Meres, *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1970.

³¹ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 3.

³² On Spenser's use of Pythagorean metempsychosis here, see S. K. Heninger, Jr., 'Pythagoras', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, et al. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1990), 575.

first meaning pertains to transportation, and the third to succession and inheritance, the second and fourth clearly pertain to the literary profession of the author. In the Legend of Friendship, Spenser's epic allegory of military death and revival absorbs all four meanings, and channels them into his authorial relation with Chaucer.

Specifically, in his allegorical completion of the tale begun by the Old Poet, the New Poet tells how Agape learns from the Fates that her three sons, Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond, are destined to die prematurely, but she secures a form of immortality on their behalf. During the brothers' battle with Cambel over his sister, Canace, Priamond dies first, but his soul migrates into the soul of Diamond; and when Diamond dies, his double soul migrates into that of Triamond, who thus possesses a triple soul: 'through traduction was eftsoones derived, . . . | Into his other brethren, that survived, | In whom he liv'd a new, of former life deprived' (4.3.13). The tripartite character of Triamond sustains complex philosophical and theological import, with roots in classical and Christian culture, principally Plato, Aquinas, Ficino, and Pico.³³ Yet the equation between the process of traduction during a military battle and the earlier process of infusion during the literary competition allows us to discern Spenser's vocational design. He completes Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* with an allegory that models the metaphysical principle ordering his authorial relation with Chaucer. In other words, he presents traduction as a tripartite process of both spiritual and literary immortality. Since he relies on traduction to complete the Old Poet's tale, he associates the spiritual process with Chaucerian literary invention in order to succeed as national poet.

Shakespeare uses Spenser's Chaucerian principle of traduction to structure not simply *Love's Labor's Lost* but also 'The Phoenix and Turtle'. He does so to represent the process of authorship itself, and in particular to participate in the traduction of the two great English authors preceding him, both of whom were dead in 1601 when he composed 'The Phoenix and Turtle' for Robert Chester's

³³ For details, see Cheney, 'Triamond', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*: 'the names of Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond suggest the first, second, and third worlds that Neoplatonists such as Ficino and Pico found in Plato's *Timaeus* (30B): terrestrial, celestial, and supercelestial. . . . The story of Agape and her sons also suggests the scholastic doctrine of the soul, in which during the generation of the individual the two lesser souls, the vegetative and the sensitive, are drawn into the higher soul, the rational, so that man has one perfect soul combining the three. . . . Scholastic doctrine further suggests that the three powers of the soul correspond to three kinds of love, named by Aquinas as natural, sensitive, and rational' (698–9). Cheney neglects the *literary* dimension of the allegory.

Love's Martyr. In this mysterious philosophical lyric, Shakespeare deploys Chaucer's strategy of self-effacing displacement to present himself in Spenser's laureate fashion: he is heir to the premier authors of English nationhood. In this way, 'The Phoenix and Turtle' speaks to the transition from medieval to early modern that is the subject of the present volume.

Before looking into 'The Phoenix and Turtle' for its Chaucerian and Spenserian genealogy, we might investigate what underlies their authorial technique of representing literary form as a three-part structure. To my knowledge, this topic has never been studied in its own right. Consequently, a brief overview of the key documents may be in order. Almost certainly, the topic traces to Plato, who said in the *Republic*:

there is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation, ... tragedy and comedy, and another which employs the recital of the poet himself, best exemplified, I presume, in the dithyramb, and there is again that which employs both, in epic poetry.³⁴

Plato divides literature into three 'kinds' and concentrates on the means by which they work:

- 1) *drama*, which divides into tragedy and comedy;
- 2) *dithyramb*, which corresponds to early modern lyric poetry; and
- 3) *epic* poetry.

To distinguish among the three kinds, Plato relies on narrative technique or voice. Drama works through imitation of an action or mimesis; the dithyramb operates through the poet's 'recital' of his own (first-person) voice; and epic combines the two.

Plato's tripartite Greek model of authorial voice and literary form finds its most notable successor in the Roman Virgilian model of a literary career prefacing the earliest extant editions of the *Aeneid*:

I am he who once composed a song on a slender pipe; then, having left the woods, I made the fields nearby obey the settler even if he was very greedy, and the work pleased the farmers; now, however, (I sing of) the fearful (arms) of Mars (and the man).³⁵

³⁴ Plato, *Republic* III.394c, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961).

³⁵ Quoted in Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, trans. and ed. Charles Segal (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 85. We do not know whether Virgil wrote the verses himself, but, as Conte observes, they were available to Ovid, who imitates them in the opening poem of the *Amores* (85, 87). See also Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997), 33–5.

Effectively, here 'Virgil' speaks in his own epic voice, transposing Plato's tripartite model of authorial voice and literary form to the three-part structure of his literary career.³⁶ Virgil inaugurates his career with the youthful genre of pastoral in the *Eclogues*, foregrounding the idea of otium; he follows with the middle genre of didactic poetry in the *Georgics*, emphasizing the idea of labor; and he concludes with the mature genre of epic in the *Aeneid* itself, highlighting the idea of national duty. In other words, the Virgilian verses transport Plato's *schematic division* of kinds into lyric, epic, and drama to a *progressive typology* connecting pastoral, georgic, and epic.

During the Middle Ages, Dante then transposes the Virgilian progressive typology to the formal practice of the Christian poet.³⁷ In Book 2 of *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante displays his gift for triadic pattern that is the hallmark of the *Divine Comedy* by mapping out the current state of poetry. In chapter 2, he aims to decide 'which subjects in particular are worthy' of 'excellent poets' who 'use the illustrious vernacular' (70). He concludes that the subjects should be 'precisely those things which we esteem as most worthy of all', and turns to the faculty psychology that estimates worth: the 'tripartite soul... animal, vegetable, and rational', by which 'man... walks a threefold path': the vegetable soul seeks the 'useful'; the animal, the 'pleasurable'; and the rational, the 'right'. Since 'we perform our every action because of these three things,' vernacular poets should determine 'which are the greatest things' (71). The useful seeks 'security'; the pleasurable, 'love'; and the right, 'virtue': 'these three things... appear to be the greatest things, to be treated in the highest way, that is, the things most closely adhere to them: prowess in arms, kindling of love, rectitude of will' (71). Dante then connects this template linking inwardness, action, and literary subject to the literary history of his own time: 'On these subjects alone, if I remember rightly, we find illustrious men who have composed poetry in the vernacular, both French and Italian: Bertran de Born on arms, Arnaut Daniel on love, Guiraunt de Bornelh on righteousness; also Cino de Pistoia on love, and his friend [Dante himself] on righteousness.' After quoting these authors to represent each kind, he observes: 'But I find no

³⁶ On this topic, including origins to the Virgilian career, see Joseph Farrell, 'Greek Lives and Roman Careers in the Classical *Vita* Tradition', in Cheney and de Armas (eds), *European Literary Careers*, 24–46.

³⁷ The discussion of Dante is drawn from Cheney, "Novells", which does not discuss Shakespeare. Dante quotations come from *De vulgari eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile*, trans. and ed. Marianne Shapiro (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, Press, 1990).

Italian up to now who has any poetry on deeds of arms' (71). Dante's phrase 'any poetry *on* deeds of arms' intimates how he aims to *translate* the three topics to three corresponding literary kinds.

In chapter 3, Dante then links the three subjects to literary form, inventing a hierarchy of three kinds—the low sonnet, the middle *ballate*, and the high *canzoni*—and he suggests that the three 'subjects worthy of the vernacular are to be treated [only] in the *canzoni*' (72–3). Finally, in chapter 4 he relates form to style, introducing the lower elegiac, the middle comic, and the higher tragic, determining that the three subjects are to be treated only in the high, tragic style of the *canzoni* (74). He ends by turning to Virgil to distinguish between great and mediocre poets: 'those whom the poet in *Aeneid* VI calls dear to god, and sons of the gods . . . , who were raised to heaven by their own ardent virtue' and 'those who, immune to art and knowledge and trusting only in their own wit, break into song about the highest things': 'let them cease in their presumption, and if they are geese by natural inclination or habitual apathy, let them not dare to imitate the star-seeking eagle' (75). In this way, Dante presents a comprehensive practice—of literary styles, forms, life styles, and psychologies—as an Italian version of the Latin model he finds in Virgil.³⁸

In the *Februarie* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser uses the three-part Dantean scheme to describe the career of 'Tityrus':

Many meete tales of youth did he make,
And some of love, and some of chevalrie:
But none fitter then this to applie.
Now listen a while, and hearken the end. (98–101)

This passage has never been annotated in modern editions of Spenser. Of the criticism that exists, the most authoritative is by John A. Burrow in his *Spenser Encyclopedia* article on Chaucer: 'Thus, in Chaucer's tales or "novells," the wisdom of the old proves acceptable to young Cuddie, and the youthful excitement of love and war once more stirs old Thenot. Chaucer's poetry transcends the opposition between youth and age which the eclogue otherwise displays, because his combination of wisdom and story attracts both equally.'³⁹ To the twin topics of

³⁸ On medieval literary 'practice' juxtaposed with classical and early modern literary 'careers', see Robert R. Edwards, 'Medieval Literary Careers: The Theban Track', in Cheney and de Armas (eds), *European Literary Careers*, 104–28.

³⁹ J. A. Burrow, 'Chaucer, Geoffrey', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 145.

'love and war', we can add their corresponding genres, as well as a third kind, the 'tale of truth'.⁴⁰

In this passage, Spenser makes one of his most important contributions to a historical narrative about the reception of Chaucer. He understands Chaucer to have devised three kinds of novels:

- 1) 'some of love': *love lyric*;
- 2) 'some of chevalrie': *chivalric epic*; and
- 3) 'a tale of truth': *didactic poetry*.

Effectively, Spenser inventories a generically based Chaucerian triad. He divides Chaucer's 'tales' into the three forms that Dante had outlined: 'prowess in arms, kindling of love, rectitude of will'. Finally, the Chaucerian triad intersects with the Virgilian triad of pastoral, georgic, and epic.

We do not know why Spenser assigns the Dantean triad of authorial forms to Chaucer, but the recent work of Krier allows for fresh speculation: the Virgilian Spenser finds in *The Parlement of Foules* a three-part Dantean map of Chaucerian literary form, fused onto the tripartite structure of subjective literary voice.⁴¹ In 'The Phoenix and Turtle', I suggest, Shakespeare reads the Spenser–Chaucerian genealogy accurately. He constructs a new genealogy that leads up to his own authorship, especially his most notable generic achievement: the reinvention of Western tragedy. By looking further at the formal three-part structure of Shakespeare's 67-line philosophical lyric, we may see how its curious modulation of voices incorporates Spenserian and Chaucerian authorship.

In the first part of the poem (stanzas 1–5), the voice of Shakespearean lyric calls the Spenserian nationalist voice to assembly:

Let the bird of loudest lay,
On the sole Arabian tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey. (1–4)

⁴⁰ John Watkins, *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), quotes the passage, but he erases the phrase 'some of chevelrie' (84), presumably because he emphasizes Chaucer's didactic poetry.

⁴¹ Joseph Dane, 'Chaucer's House of Fame and the *Rota Virgilia*', *Classical and Modern Literature* 1 (1980), 57–75, finds the Virgilian triad of pastoral, didactic, and epic in *The House of Fame*.

We do not know the identity of the ‘bird of loudest lay’, but long ago Alexander Grosart suggested the nightingale.⁴² Grosart may well be right, in part because Spenser had adopted the nightingale as an avian sign for his role as national poet.⁴³ As the shepherd Thenot says in the *November* eclogue of Colin Clout, Spenser’s persona, ‘The Nightingale is sovereigne of song’ (25). Moreover, the ‘trumpet’ played by the bird of loudest lay is the traditional instrument of epic poetry (*Faerie Queene* 1.Pr.1), while the ‘chaste wings’ obeying the ‘sound’ of the trumpet evokes the amorous dynamic intrinsic to the genre of Spenser’s ‘epic romance’.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, the first line of the poem uses an ‘antique sounding dialect’, while the ‘Invocation [proceeds] in a Virgilian fashion’.⁴⁵ Hence, the opening stanza may glance at Spenser’s status as the ‘Virgil of England’,⁴⁶ and more precisely at the ‘antique’ topic and style that Shakespeare had assigned to Spenser as the ‘antique pen’ in Sonnet 106 (line 7).⁴⁷

In the remaining stanzas of part one, Shakespeare selects the other avian participants for the funeral service. He banishes the ‘shrieking harbinger’ and the ‘tyrant wing’, and selects the eagle to serve as judge, the swan as priest, and the crow as chief mourner. The details associate the troop with artistic sound, firm law, purified religion, and chaste duty, and suggest that the choir relies on its faith in song to combat mutability—a hallmark of Spenser, who ends up crowning his literary career with the *Mutabilitie Cantos*.⁴⁸ In the avian choir, it is as if Shakespeare were fictionalizing a community of poets organized around the leadership of

⁴² Alexander Grosart (ed.), *Robert Chester’s Love’s Martyr, or Rosalins Complaint (1601), with its Supplement, ‘Diverse Poeticall Essaies’ on the Turtle and Phoenix by Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, John Marston*, New Shakspeare Society Series 8, No. 2 (London, 1878), 241.

⁴³ Cheney, *Spenser’s Famous Flight*, 77–110.

⁴⁴ See C. Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), esp. 1–10. Editors conventionally gloss line 4 of ‘Phoenix’ with *Faerie Queene* 3.11.35; see Rollins (ed.), *New Variorum Shakespeare*, 324; F. T. Prince (ed.), *The Poems*, Arden Shakespeare, 2nd series (London: Methuen, 1960), 179, mistakenly citing 3.2.35. Additionally, James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets’ War* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001), suggests Spenser’s Gardens of Adonis in *Faerie Queene* 3.6 as a model for Shakespeare’s Neoplatonic representation of love (199); C. Burrow notes that Chester’s *Love’s Martyr* is ‘clearly indebted to Spenser and Samuel Daniel’ (*Complete Sonnets and Poems* 84); and Roy T. Eriksen, ‘“Un certo amoroso martire”: Shakespeare’s “The Phoenix and the Turtle” and Giordano Bruno’s *De gli eroici furori*’, *Spenser Studies* 2 (1981), 193–215, attributes the poem’s ‘compositional technique’ to Spenser (211).

⁴⁵ Everett, ‘Set upon a Golden Bough’, 14.

⁴⁶ Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, rev. F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 1:299.

⁴⁷ In addition to Cheney, ‘Shakespeare’s Sonnet 106’, see Bednarz, ‘Imitations’, 87–8, for Shakespeare’s response to Spenser’s ‘antique fables’ at *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* 5.1.3.

⁴⁸ Matchett notes that ‘Shakespeare’s poem emphasiz[es] . . . the voices of the birds’ (190).

Edmund Spenser, perhaps in response to the New Poet's own triumphal representation of this community in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595).⁴⁹

In part two (stanzas 6–13), Shakespeare records the anthem that the parliament of fowls sings:

Here the anthem doth commence:
 Love and Constancy is dead,
 Phoenix and the Turtle fled
 In a mutual flame from hence.
 So they loved as love in twain
 Had the essence but in one,
 Two distincts, division none:
 Number there in love was slain. (21–8)

Since Shakespeare's paradoxes have been examined extensively, we may recall here simply that he represents 'a wonder' (32) in which two 'distinct' figures have the 'essence but in one'—a wonder also well known to be central to Spenser's poetics.⁵⁰ Less often noted is the way that the avian anthem *figures* Chaucerian literary form, in particular the complaint.⁵¹ In the move from the first to the second part of the poem, then, Shakespeare's lyric voice portrays the Spenserian voice ventriloquizing the voice of Chaucer, in the very move that Spenser had advertised in Book 4 of *The Faerie Queene*.

Yet Shakespeare does not simply reproduce the Spenserian ventriloquism of Chaucer in verse form. In this part of the poem, he overgoes the Chaucerian Spenser by inserting a third fictional voice, spoken by the figure of Reason, who, at least in retrospect, looks like a playful icon for Shakespearean tragic character itself, wittily adept at rehearsing the mystery of erotic union:

Reason, in itself confounded,
 Saw division grow together,
 To themselves yet either neither,

⁴⁹ See Patrick Cheney, 'Colin Clouts Come Home Againe and *Astrophel*,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard McCabe (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), forthcoming.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Lauren Silberman, 'Hermaphrodite', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 357–8.

⁵¹ On Chaucer and the complaint form, see Georgia Ronan Crampton, *The Condition of Creatures: Suffering and Action in Chaucer and Spenser* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974); and Hugh Maclean, 'Complaints', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, 177–81.

Simple were so well compounded:

That it cried, 'How true a twain

Seemeth this concordant one!

Love hath reason, Reason none,

If what parts, can so remain.'

Whereupon it made this threne,

To the Phoenix and the Dove,

Co-supremes and stars of love,

As chorus to their tragic scene.

(41–52)

Reason undergoes an epiphany here, witnessing a miracle in which 'division grow[s] together.' Reason is so affected by this miracle that he proclaims his loss of reason, in the process introducing a new rational form of mind, humorously animated by eros. Shakespeare may glance at the *Parlement*, for one of the tercels remarks, 'Ful hard were it to preve by resoun | Who loveth best this gentil formel here' (534–5). Dame Nature ignores him, and also humorously contradicts her earlier judgment to let the formel make her own choice: 'But as for counseyl for to chese a make, | If I were Resoun, thanne wolde I | Conseytle yow the royal tercel take' (631–3).

As Shakespeare's rhyme of 'threne' with 'scene' concluding part two above anticipates, in the third part of the poem the poet-playwright introduces a third literary form: that of tragic theater. In the unit titled 'Threnos', he depicts the mysterious contents of Reason's dramatic tragedy:

Beauty, Truth, and Rarity,

Grace in all simplicity,

Here enclos'd, in cinders lie.

Death is now the Phoenix' nest,

And the Turtle's loyal breast

To eternity doth rest.

(53–8)

In this Spenserian allegory, the author's phrase 'To eternity doth rest' is especially resonant, meaning either that the breast of the turtle will rest until eternity or that the turtle's breast will rest eternally in death. The ambiguity stakes out the very ground for and transition between two models of death that recent commentators locate in the tragic theater of Shakespeare: the traditional Christian model of death as salvation, and

the one to which it gives way during the seventeenth century, death as annihilation.⁵²

As commentators observe, the next two stanzas—in which the phoenix and turtle fail to leave behind a ‘posterity’ because of ‘married chastity’ (59–61)—leave Reason staring into the void: ‘Truth and Beauty buried be’ (64). This mini-allegory is as fine a rendering as we have of the erasure of Spenser’s theological signature in the Legend of Holiness, where repeatedly we discover versions of the Satyrs’ innate attraction to Una: ‘They in compassion of her tender youth, | And wonder of her *beautie* soverayne, | Are wonne with pittie and unwonted *truth*’ (1.6.12.5–7; emphasis added).

Shakespeare’s final stanza then takes his poem more fully into tragic territory:

To this urn let those repair
That are either true or fair;
For these dead birds sigh a prayer. (65–7)

According to Everett, ‘the turtle’s breast rests to eternity with an absolute-ness that makes dying the most active experience of a life-time, a wordless reversal of that calming with which the poem begins.’⁵³ What Shakespeare immortalizes is not the Christian soul ascending to Spenser’s New Jerusalem (*Faerie Queene* 1.10.55–9) but the body’s eternizing performance of death as annihilation. This versified performance may be the poem’s greatest achievement.⁵⁴

To summarize, ‘The Phoenix and Turtle’ ends up depicting an historic typology of authorship, in which the literary voices of Spenser, Chaucer, and Shakespeare modulate through the poem’s three units:

⁵² This is the book-length topic of Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994). In ‘Dido to Daphne: Early Modern Death in Spenser’s Shorter Poems’, *Spenser Studies* 18 (2003), 143–63, I discuss the applicability of the Shakespearean model to Spenser. For invaluable application to Shakespeare’s lyric, see Richard C. McCoy, ‘Love’s Martyrs: Shakespeare’s “Phoenix and Turtle” and the Sacrificial Sonnets’, in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 188–208.

⁵³ Everett, ‘Set upon a Golden Bough’, 15.

⁵⁴ On the performance of death in Shakespeare and early modern drama, see Michael Neil, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), esp. 36.

- 1) In part one, the Shakespearean lyric voice represents the Spenserian voice of epic romance calling the fiction of the avian choir to life.
- 2) In part two, the Shakespearean lyric voice depicts the Spenserian voice appropriating the voice of Chaucer, as the avian choir within the fiction values the philosophical mystery of the birds' Neoplatonic conjunction and mourns the passing of their 'mutual flame'.
- 3) In part three, the Shakespearean lyric voice dramatizes the loving voice of Reason, a character within the fiction of the anthem who presents the 'Threnos' as a Greek tragedy because the phoenix and turtle have chosen 'married chastity' over offspring.

In this way, the three-part structure contains a representation of Shakespeare's intertextual method itself. Through 'traduction' and 'infusion sweete', the voice of Spenser ventriloquizes the subjective spirit and literary form of Chaucer, and then, successively, the voice of Chaucer ventriloquizes the dramatic voice of Shakespeare. In the end, it is this third author who survives, like Spenser's triple-soul figure of artistic traduction, Triamond.

Although 'The Phoenix and Turtle' may gesture to a national political crisis, it formally clarifies only the authorial voice addressing that crisis, not the crisis itself. The voice the poem identifies is not just that of the Shakespearean lyric poet writing the poem but a tripartite intertextual voice composed of nationally significant authors. In this lyric, Spenserian romance epic modulates into Chaucerian complaint, and together they modulate into Shakespearean tragedy.⁵⁵ This complex intertextual model of sixteenth-century authorship, more than the twentieth-century's simplistic 'man of the theatre', best historicizes Shakespeare's professional production.⁵⁶ In 1601, Shakespeare may be a consummate theatrical man, but he is also an author with a literary career.

⁵⁵ See Everett, 'Set upon a Golden Bough': 'In the year of *Loves Martyr*, *Hamlet* first held the stage, its author recognized as master of the public theatre, but still open to dismissal by well-born or university-trained writers. But *Hamlet* is a court tragedy. And in "The Phoenix and Turtle" the poet is perhaps making plain that he can equal or outdo the court makers of his time in their own mode' (14). Also on the lyric and the tragedy, see Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, ix.

⁵⁶ For Shakespeare as 'supremely...a man of the theatre', see *The Oxford Shakespeare. William Shakespeare: The Complete Works: Compact Edition*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), xxxvi. For the most influential rebuttal, arguing that Shakespeare wrote his plays for both page and stage, see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003).

He succeeds in combining a philosophical lyric poem like ‘The Phoenix and Turtle’ alongside a watershed tragedy like *Hamlet*. In the process, Shakespeare crafts out a professional space for his succession from Spenser and Chaucer, exquisitely poised for the very title he will soon come to inherit: England’s National Poet.⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ For this ‘Shakespeare’, in response to Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), see Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare’s Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008).

6

Recursive Origins

Print History and Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*

William Kuskin

Literary Studies has an ambivalent relationship to precedence. Caught between the recognition of chronology and the urgency of formal innovation, it resorts to claims of the new: to a new vernacular literary culture in the fourteenth century, to a new formulation of authorship in the sixteenth, and to an early modern print revolution.¹ So, Literary Studies reports a fractured timeline, one paradoxically committed to chronology as a progressive record of temporal change and to period as a convincing explanation for cultural difference. Such an approach to late medieval and early modern literary history neglects both the fifteenth century and the historical role played by the material reproduction of texts. These omissions are closely related, I would argue, for not

¹ The major literary histories published by Oxford and Cambridge insist on progress and period. For example, David Wallace's *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999) and James Simpson's *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002) both discuss an active medieval literary culture of vernacular literary production, which they present as coming to an end before the early modern period. Similarly, Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp's *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. iii: 1400–1557 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999) isolates print from manuscript production and claims a firm division at 1557. Lastly, David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller's *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002) argues for the development of authorship and print culture in the sixteenth century (88, 108).

only do fifteenth-century books endure, but they are reprinted: all of John Lydgate's major texts—the *Troy Book*, the *Siege of Thebes*, and the *Fall of Princes*—were published in the sixteenth century, and much of William Caxton's print portfolio—the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Confessio amantis*, *Le Morte Darthur*, and Aesop's fables, to name only his major literary texts—were reissued after his death, some well into the seventeenth century. There is clear evidence that major sixteenth-century writers knew these texts. For example, though Spenser asserts the title of 'the new Poete' in print, he relies not just on Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* for *The Faerie Queene*, but on Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* for the epistle to the *Shepheardes Calender*, and on Skelton's persona, Colin Clout.² Shakespeare drew directly on Caxton's *Recuyell* for his *Troilus and Cressida*. Lydgate, Malory, Skelton, and Caxton: the major fifteenth-century authors set a powerful precedent for sixteenth-century writing. If we see old books and reprinted editions as merely static containers, and thus insignificant because they are not *original*, we can maintain a firm distinction between precedence and innovation; if we instead take seriously the imaginative power of literature—its ability to be renewed with each reading—we must also allow that any reevaluation of the relationship between Shakespeare and the Middle Ages needs to set aside the literary history of paradox and be recast in terms of contingency.

Fifteenth-century English literature contains an extended self-reflexive aspect that facilitates the reproduction of a vernacular canon. Reproduction is at the core of fifteenth-century literary culture—in its conception of scribal duplication, in its imagination of an apparatus for textual reproduction that is itself produced from the bits and pieces of other forms of craft knowledge (the wine press, metallurgy, book manufacture), and in its particular technique of reproducing Chaucer's poetic (down to his very lines) as a tangible tradition. In this last sense, fifteenth-century literary culture constructs itself from itself, creating Chaucer as canonical by appropriating from its copies of his writing postures for poetic authority that ratify his importance.³ Such a strategy

² I explore Spenser's use of Lydgate in the *Shepheardes Calender* in "'The Loadstarre of the English Language': Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* and the Construction of Modernity", *Textual Cultures* 2:2 (2007), 9–33.

³ See Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993). I develop the notion of fifteenth-century literary reproduction more fully in my introduction to *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

is fraught with the risk of infinite regression: participating so completely in the Chaucerian mode, many fifteenth-century poets are unable to distinguish themselves from Chaucer's influence and so appear entirely derivative, laboring forever in his shadow. Observing this, sixteenth-century writers appropriate fifteenth-century literary forms from persona to typography, but encapsulate the culture as a whole into period. Fifteenth-century literary culture actively inflects how early modernity is written, and the modern, in turn, casts it as anterior to itself, contained within a historical narrative.

What is learned in the sixteenth century, then, is subordination. 'Why England, (the Mother of excellent mindes,) should bee growne so hard a step-mother to Poets,' asks Philip Sidney in *An Apologie for Poetrie*.⁴ The question proposes a powerful analogy between vernacular letters and a lost childhood, one in which the fifteenth century is figured as the harsh middle years from which the mature adult escapes. But who suffered this adolescence and what did they write? Sidney's memory apparently fails, though the books that contain their names are obviously within his reach. For example, the *Apologie* is intimately connected to the *Shepheardes Calender*, which freely alludes to Lydgate and Skelton and is clearly familiar with their texts, fluent in their poetic. Still, Sidney imagines English literary history as a romance of lost origins, and virtually every literary history on the market today follows him by either positing an essential break with the past in the 1550s or by studying the long return to Chaucer.⁵ In both cases, the fifteenth century is elided into an absent middle ground even as it structures the development of modern poetics. Thus I suggest that paradox is the wrong term for such a literary history of precedence and innovation, appropriation and subordination, which is better understood as recursive.

One way into this recursive circuit is through a moment of textual origins freighted with epoch-making significance: the first appearance of a Shakespeare

⁴ Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London, 1595), I2^v. I explore this metaphor of infancy in my introduction to *Caxton's Trace: Studies in the History of English Printing*, ed. William Kuskin (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 1–7.

⁵ On the one hand are histories that trace a progression of fifteenth-century writers, such as A. C. Spearing's *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), Alexandra Gillespie's *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and their Books, 1473–1557* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), and Robert J. Meyer-Lee's *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007). These studies are limited by the date of 1557. On the other hand are studies like E. Talbot Donaldson's *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985) and Theresa M. Krier's collection, *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1998), that overlook the fifteenth century in favor of a direct connection to Chaucer.

play in print. Printed by Thomas Creede for Thomas Millington as an anonymous quarto in 1594, this is *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, and it reports, in a somewhat short version, the play now known as 2 *Henry VI*.⁶ *The Contention* was followed in 1595 by an octavo printed by Peter Short, also for Millington and also unattributed, entitled *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York and the death of good King Henrie the Sixt* and now known as 3 *Henry VI*. In 1600 Millington had Valentine Simmes reprint *The Contention* and William White reprint *The True Tragedie*. These two plays were produced in continuous register in 1619 by William Jaggard for Thomas Pavier as *The Whole Contention*, ‘newly corrected and enlarged’ and ‘Written by William Shake-speare, Gent.’ This last version presents the plays with *The Late, and Much Admired Play, called, Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, and together the three seem to begin a much larger collection.⁷ It is not until the 1623 Folio, however, that the *Henry VI* plays are reordered as the second and third parts of a continuous narrative, fronted by *The First Part of King Henry the Sixt*. Scholarly discussion of *The Contention* tends to focus on its textual authority, and the play has served as the centerpiece for the argument that the early quartos are memorial reconstructions.⁸ My interest in the quarto—be it pirated copy, collaborative precursor, or Shakespearean abridgement—is that it is a concrete moment of origins that troubles the notion of origins overall. For regardless of our assessment of its authority, *The Contention* both records Shakespeare’s early interest in the fifteenth century and reveals his emergence into print not as a clean break, but as a convoluted process of repeated return. Hence my central thesis: texts do not emerge simply by linear means, and so a literary history premised on linearity, however modified by

⁶ When I refer to Shakespeare’s play in the abstract, I use the conventional title, 2 *Henry VI*. Otherwise, I refer either to the 1594 *Contention* (STC 26099), which I note parenthetically as Q1 followed by the signature, or the version in the 1623 Folio, *The Second Part of Henry the Sixt*, which I cite parenthetically as F, followed by the page number. I have modernized long ‘s’ throughout. Ronald Knowles presents a convenient facsimile of *The Contention* in the Arden edition, *King Henry VI: Part 2* (1999; rpt, London: Thomson Learning, 2001). Andrew Murphy lists *Venus and Adonis* as Shakespeare’s only publication before *The Contention* and places *Titus Andronicus* (also 1594) after it. See Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 287.

⁷ Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print*, 40. The STC lists the other editions I mention above as follows: 1595, *The True Tragedie*, STC 21006; 1600, *The First Part of the Contention*, STC 26100; 1600, *The True Tragedie*, STC 21006a; and 1619, *The Whole Contention*, STC 26101.

⁸ This discussion is usefully reviewed by Thomas A. Pendleton in his introduction *Henry VI: Critical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1–25, and Knowles, *King Henry VI: Part 2*, ‘Appendix 2: Q1 and Q3 Variants’, 408–33.

notions of reform or revolution, fails to capture the essentially self-referential nature of literary reproduction.

The Contention is thus a metonym for my argument as a whole, and I read it as representing a complex process eclipsed by the reassuring movement of chronology and the drama of originality. Here, my investigation focuses on five texts. First, I note that the two main printed versions of *2 Henry VI*, *The Contention* and the Folio's *Second Part of Henry the Sixth*, utilize the material text as a trope within their plots. This suggests that the return to the past featured in these plays is imbricated in the very form of that return: the book. The plays' figuration of texts leads us in two different directions. Taken one way, it continues the self-consciousness about textual reproduction endemic in fifteenth-century writing. So, I trace the play's interest in the history of the book back to a supremely self-reflexive moment: the entry on the invention of printing in the Holinshed Syndicate's 1587 *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* and from there to a similar passage in William Caxton's 1480 *Chronicles of England*.⁹ But even at this level of analysis there exists no point of origins, for Caxton's own telling of the invention and spread of print—surely a self-reflexive moment if ever there were one—is in fact a reproduction of earlier manuscript chronicles. This brings me to what I see as a significant point: the historical form of the book asserts a structural force within the writing of the history of the book. This structural force—call it *textual formalism*—is literally impressed into the pages that tell English history, creating a kind of loop in which the books of history embody the history of books. Thus, *The Contention*'s figuration of the book allows us to see a formal continuity between manuscript and print into the sixteenth century. Taken another way, *2 Henry VI*—particularly the Folio version—actively subordinates fifteenth-century writing. In doing so, Shakespeare's play, despite its profound engagement with fifteenth-century ideas about reproduction, epitomizes a more ambivalent or dismissive sixteenth-century attitude toward them. In order to illustrate the pervasiveness of this complicated stance, at the end of this essay I turn away from *2 Henry VI* and toward the 1596/7 edition of

⁹ As Raphael Holinshed died in 1580, the final edition of the chronicles was assembled by a group of writers, known as the Syndicate, that included Richard Stanyhurst, Abraham Fleming, John Stow, Francis Thynne, John Hooker, and William Harrison. See Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994). I will be using volume three of the Holinshed Syndicate's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London, 1587). The *STC* numbers this edition as 13569.5. Caxton's *Chronicles of England* is *STC* 9991. Subsequent citations will be given parenthetically.

Caxton's first text, *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. I suggest, as my final point, that an alternative to the ambivalent literary history of chronological progress and revolutionary break lies in the book itself, a form that lends itself to recursive manipulation but also transcends it, indeed transcends temporality, to demonstrate the larger continuities in English literature.

The book—or more generally, textuality—is a central conceit in both versions of 2 *Henry VI*. Much of *The Contention* is organized around physical scraps of texts. The play's motivating occasion, the announcement of marriage between Henry and Margaret, is affirmed by 'the Articles confirmde of peace' (Q1, A2^v), and the peers' dismay with the deal contained therein is explicitly textual: 'Duke *Humphrey* lets it fall' the Quarto's stage directions announce (Q1, A2^v), and York frames his objection through his reading of history: 'As I haue read, our Kinges of England were woont to haue large dowries' (Q1, A4). Later, Suffolk and the Queen's conspiracy grows while reading the Petitioners' 'writings', which are, like the early articles, remarked upon in *The Contention*'s stage directions as physically present ('He teares the papers,' Q1, B2^v). Later still, Lady Eleanor uses a 'scrole of paper' to conjure spirits (Q1, B4^v), and this scroll is poured over on stage no less than three times: once by Sir John in the conjuring ('*Elnor*. Here sir *Iohn*, take this scrole of paper here,' Q1, B4^v), once by Buckingham in the discovery ('*Buc*. See here my Lord what the diuell hath writ,' Q1, C1), and once again by Buckingham in the accusation ('*Reads*. The Duke yet liues, that Henry shal depose . . .,' Q1, C3^v). Subsequently, Eleanor is marked with 'verses written on her backe and pind on' (Q1, D2). As the action becomes more intense, texts remain in the forefront: Henry learns of Stafford's death and Jack Cade's rebellion by letter (Q1, F4^v) and, of course, Jack Cade rants and raves against textuality. As *The Contention*'s version is almost a third shorter than the Folio's, and contains more detailed stage directions, its rendition of the fifteenth-century English court contains a palpable density of textual emphasis.

If *The Contention* depicts the English fifteenth century as fundamentally textual, it also insists that we take these texts as meaningful in a variety of ways: they are physical objects within the world that are read, dropped, passed around, shredded, and pinned on a person's back; they are symbolic objects as well, conduits for information, signs of authority, and markers of identity. As such, they often perform a double service within the play: so, just as William de la Pole uses the Articles to promote himself to the Duke of Suffolk, these Articles lie behind his eventual impeachment; similarly, Lady Eleanor employs the scroll to conjure spirits, and this same scroll is thus proof that she consorts with them. York's first major speech captures this duality well, summing up the problem with Henry's kingship in a single line: 'Whose bookish rule

hath puld faire England downe' (Q1, A4^v). Taken literally, York's assessment objects to Henry's religiosity, to his willingness to defer all matters to The Book. So, too, in the Quarto Margaret complains that Henry's 'eyes are alwaies poring on his booke' (Q1, B2^v). Yet the book is also a cogent symbol for Henry's authority, a reminder of his God-given role as King, a tangible expression of his values, a marker of his honest piety. The critique of 'bookishness' ultimately cuts both ways, alternately revealing Henry as too otherworldly to rule and the English court as too worldly to be ruled. Many years ago Margaret Deanesly characterized fifteenth-century England by its 'extreme booklessness' and the description stuck.¹⁰ *The Contention* imagines the exact opposite: a fifteenth century so entirely papered over that texts figure both the constitution and the critique of its polity.

Emerging as the driving rhetorical force in the play after Humphrey and Suffolk have been eliminated, Jack Cade brings its fascination with bookishness to a head. In the Quarto, Cade's charges begin with the trial of the Clarke of Chattam (who is to be hung, 'with his penny-inckhorne about his necke' for the crimes of being able to write his name, of possessing a book with red letters and for the 'setting of boyes coppies', Q1, F3^v), proceed to a tirade against the very materials of writing ('Why ist not a miserable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should parchment be made, & then with a litle blotting ouer with inke, a man should vndo himselfe,' Q1, G2), and culminate in the trial of Lord Saye, whom Cade condemns:

thou hast most traitorously erected a grammer schoole, to infect the youth of the realme, and against the Kings Crowne and dignitie, thou hast built vp a paper-mill, nay it wil be said to thy face, that thou kepst men in thy house that daily reades of bookes with red letters, and talkes of a Nowne and a Verbe, and such abhominable words as no Christian eare is able to endure it. And besides all that, thou hast appointed certaine Iustises of peace in euery shire to hang honest men that steale for their liuing, and because they could not reade, thou hast hung them vp: Onely for which cause they were most worthy to liue. (Q1, G2)

Initially, Cade's ravings seem haphazard, a broadside attack on writing by the semi-literate, but his insistence on the doubling, physical and symbolic, nature of texts continues the play's drift. For according to Cade the materials of books—parchment, ink, a paper mill—are inseparable from the authority that they disseminate. So, he points out that one can no more strike out the nouns and verbs of social injustice than the books and schools that construct them as authoritative. His observation—that textual authority works against the illiterate ('and because they

¹⁰ Margaret Deanesly, 'Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920), 349–58, 349.

could not reade, thou hast hung them vp')—has an undeniable righteousness, and so Cade's logic is to eliminate the symbolic axis of textual representation entirely, to reduce all symbolic representation to a kind of empiricism, the reiteration of the obvious. So, he knights his fellows: 'Kneele downe Iohn Mortemer, | Rise vp sir Iohn Mortemer . . . kneele downe Dicke Butcher, | Rise vp sir Dicke Butcher' (Q1, F4). 'O monstrous simplicitie' laments Stafford in response (Q1, F4^v), and this is precisely how Cade replaces the play's earlier rhetoricians, Suffolk and Humphrey: he simplifies Suffolk's carefully nuanced appropriation of royal authority at the beginning of the play to parodic self-invention ('I learnt it my selfe,' he announces of his lineage in the Quarto, F4; in the Folio he is even more freewheeling: 'I inuented it my selfe,' F1, 139), and he reduces Humphrey's lament on the destruction of historical monuments ('Ah Lords, fatall is this marriage canselling our states, | Reuersing Monuments of conquered *France*, | Vndoing all, as none had nere bene done,' Q1, A3) to a celebration of the destruction of the written record. Cade is like York: both object to a 'bookish rule' and in doing so underscore that books present a powerful trope for the construction and dismantling of authority.

All four characters, Suffolk, Humphrey, York, and Cade, are self-aware—the one so deeply scheming, the other so earnest, the third so self-righteous, the last so absurd—because they each have a profound sense that the texts that constitute them can be manipulated. This defines the 2 *Henry VI* plays' depiction of the fifteenth century as well as their relationship to their sources: the self-awareness displayed by the plays' characters toward textual origins is duplicated uncannily in the handling of their sources. For the 2 *Henry VI* plays manipulate their chronicle sources in a manner that cuts against the grain of chronology even as the play thematizes resistance to narrative authority. For example, Cade's first speech is derived from details culled from Holinshed's record of the 1381 peasants' revolt as well as from the actual 1450 Cade rebellion. *The Contention* introduces Cade with this conflation:

Cade. Therefore be braue, for your Captain is braue, and vowes reformation: you shall haue seuen half-penny loaues for a penny, and the three hoopt pot, shall haue ten hoopes, and it shall be felony to drinke small beere, and if I be king, as king I will be.

All. God saue your maiestie.

Cade. I thanke you good people, you shall all eate and drinke of my score, and go all in my liuerie, and weele haue no writing, but the score & the Tally, and there shalbe no lawes but such as comes from my mouth. (Q1, F3^v)

Holinshed's *Chronicles* tells that when John Tiler changed his name to Jack Straw and led the rebels out of Essex to Kent, he 'therefore willed them to make them readie to ioine with them for their obtaining of libertie, and reforming of the euill customs of the realme' (429). Later, in London, it tells that Wat Tyler 'should saie with great pride the day before these things chanced, putting his hands to his lips, that within foure daies all the lawes of England should come foorth of his mouth' (432). So, Cade vows Straw's reformation and claims Tyler's kingship.¹¹ In the play this is made into an explicitly textual reformation, and this too finds its echo in *The Chronicles*' report of the 1381 uprising, where the rebels 'purposed to burne and destroye all records, euidences, court-rolles, and other minuments, that the remembrance of ancient matters being remooued out of mind, their landlords might not haue whereby to chalenge anie right at their hands' (430). Cade's motives are not so pragmatic, and instead contribute to rebellion as twofold break: within the play, Cade overthrows—reforms, he says—the normal value of things so that names no longer equate to a tangible value (seven half-penny loaves are now worth a penny and a three-hoop pot shall have ten hoops). More broadly, Cade also overthrows the plot's governing structure, for according to Robert Adger Law's collation of the plays against Hall's and Holinshed's chronicles, Cade's are the only scenes in the entire trilogy that distort the chronicles' chronology by more than a decade.¹² In short, by conflating the historical rebellion of 1450 with that of John Ball, Jack Straw, and Wat Tyler in 1381, Shakespeare inserts a recursive relationship to the past into the midst of a trilogy that is overwhelmingly chronological and progressive.

Cade's rebellion is therefore thematically bookish and structurally recursive. Given this representational strategy, we should be surprised not to find these elements intimate on the formal level, woven into *2 Henry VI*'s treatment of textuality overall, and we can pursue the issue further through the Folio version of Cade's itemization of Saye's crimes, which includes printing: 'Thou hast most traiterously corrupted the youth of the Realme, in erecting a Grammar Schoole,' blusters Cade, continuing 'and whereas before, our Fore-fathers had no other Bookes but the Score the Tally, thou hast caused printing to be vs'd, and contrary to the King, his Crowne, and Dignity, thou hast built a Paper-Mill' (F1; 141). Holinshed's *Chronicles* is specific about the history of printing, including it in the entry for 1459 (see Figure 1):

¹¹ See Roger Chartier's analysis of Shakespeare's interest in merging these historical figures, 'Jack Cade, the Skin of a Dead Lamb, and the Hatred for Writing', *Shakespeare Studies* 34 (2006), 77–89.

¹² Robert Adger Law, 'The Chronicles and the Three Parts of *Henry VI*', *Univ. of Texas Studies in English* 33 (1954), 13–32.

the said persons, of any of their seruants, or tenants, should be so; euer determined & ended, sauing to euer one his title, action and right, which he had by any evidence of arrears of rents, or seruices, accounts, detriments, or debts due by reason of any labour contract, or bond, had and made for any reasonable considerations, other than the variance before said.

And for the more assurance of both parties, it was ordered that either should release to other all manner of actions, that were inuere personals and appecles, which any of them might haue against the other, by reason of the variances and discords before mentioned.

Also it was decreed, that if any action, suite or quarrell chanced betwixt any of the seruants or tenants of any of the parties, so; matter or title suspens to be law, or concluded by iudges before this time; that from thenceforth, none of the said parties should maintaine, support, or aid any of them that woul so sue and make strife and debate: but should rather so deale, as the matter may be brought to peace and quietnesse.

It was further awarded, that if any man complained, pretended, or furnished, that this award was not kept, but in some point broken by any of the parties, for the which breach he woul haue a Scire facias, or some other action prosecuted in the kings name, upon any recognisance made to the king for the performance of this award: yet should not the same Scire facias, or action be prosecuted, till the kings council might be thoughtlie certified of the matter by the complainant, and upon consideration of the cause wher the same Scire facias, or action ought to be had, as prosecuted in the kings name.

And if any variance yse betwixt the council of both the parties in making of the recognisances, releases, acquittances, or other writings; the same variance should be determined by the two lords cheefe iudices, that should be fullie instructed of the kings intention in this behaile.

And besides this, it was notified and declared by the same award, that the parties being feuerallie bound in the Chancerie in great fines to obeye and performe this award, continuance & engagemēt made by the king, it was the kings will and pleasure, that the same recognisances should stand in force, and no parcels of the summes therein contained to be paid, nor in any wise, without the agreement and consent of the parties, for whose assurance the same recognisance was taken.

And if any of the said summes, or anye parcel thereof should be recovered by action or execution taken, and prosecuted in the kings name, upon any of the said recognisances, the parties to whose liabourance the award was broken, should haue the one halfe of the monie so recovered; and the other moiety should be assigned to the tresarour of the kings house. This ordinance, award and agreement, was given by vnder the kings great seale, at the kings palace of Westminster, the foure and twentieth daie of aprell, in the fir and thirtieth yere of his reigne.

For the open publishing of this last said agreement, there was (upon our laide daie in aprell) a solemn procession celebrated within the citie; all church of saint Dunle in London, at the which the king was present in habit ecclial, with his croune on his head, before him went hand in hand the duke of Somersset, the earle of Shalburie, the duke of Gloscester, and the earle of Westmorch; and so one of the one faction, and another of the other: and behind the king the duke of Beke, and the queene with grete familiarity in appearance leading hand in hand. What shall be said? As goodlie apples corrupted at core,

(how faire coated so euer they seeme) can neuer be made to become sound againe: no; rotten woulles new plastered without, can euer the more haue their mumbering inward, till the pestiferous matter first through the crust late all in the mire: so forced it on all parts in this difference and countrefet conceit, for after this apparent peace (but inward discords) diuerse of the nobles smallie regarding their honours, forgot their oath, and broke their promise boldie.

Not long after this, of pretended purpose, (as it was thought) a fraie was made upon a peccant of the earle of Westmorch, by one of the kings seruants, in the which the assailant was sore hurt, but the earle man died. Whereupon the kings meniall seruants, seeing their fellows hurt, and the offenders escaped, assembled together and loathed the earle, when he returned from the council chamber toward his house, and suddenly set on him, the peccant with fustie, the blache gard with spits and fler-fishes. After long fight, and manie of the earles men maimed and hurt, by helpe of his friends he gat a libertie, and so escaped to London. The queene advertised herof, instantlie commanded that he should be apprehended, and committed to the tower, where (if he had bene taken) he had shortly ended his daies.

By this vntoward fraie, there arose anon after such trouble and terrible warre, that the whole realme was thereby disquieted. For after this displeasure done to the earle, and the queene good mind toward him by his secret friends reucaled; he with all diligence toke his iourneie to Westmorch, and after which complaint made, he fearing to be displaced of his roome at Calis, with great speed imbarched himselfe and sailed thither. He was not onelie detested of lieutenant of Calis, but also high admirall of the fleet, which officer was to him continued for the space of fiftie yeares. Whereupon, whether before his arrival now at Calis, or thowle after, I cannot say; but this yeare about the middest of summer, the said earle, having with him a fourtaine vessel appointed by him, sailed abroad to scowle the seas, and by chance met with fise great ships, wherof three were carakles of Genoa, and the other two were of Spaine, bigger in brightie and length than the carakles.

The earle, though he was scarce able to deale against them, yet he valiantlie encountered them. There was a deile force and long continuē battell fought betwixt them, so it lasted almost the space of three daies. Yet in the end the victorie fell to the English, so that two of these ships being forced to take the mischance flight, the other that were taken, which the earle brought into Calis, with all the merchandise aboard the same; the value wherof in wine, oille, siluer iron, cloth of gold, and other riches, was esteemed to the summe of ten thousand pounds a pound. By reason wherof, that was sold notable, tedious penie, which woul not haue bene bought before for two shillings. There were taken a great number of prisoners, beside a thousand of the enemies slain in fight. By the earles part there were fiftie slain. The earles fame hereby increased not a little, and manie a blessing he had for this piece of fortune.

The noble seience of Printing was about this time found in Germanie at Hagunze by one John Guttenbergus a knight: one Conradus a Germane brought it into Rome: William Caxton of London mercer brought it into England about the yeare 1471: and first translated the same in the abbey of saint Dunle at Westminster; after which time it was therewith practised in the abbies of S. Augustine

2. Some
recognisance
of
1459

Anno Reg. 31.
W. R.

The earle of
Westmorch
killed.

The queene
advised.

Wherewith
the earle of
Westmorch
was killed.

And
the
merchandise

Abt. 1471
the
printing
was
invented.

Figure 1. Raphael Holinshed, et al., *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London, 1577), page 648, STC 13569. 2pt 1. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The noble science of Printing was about this time found in Germanie at Magunce by one Iohn Cuthemburgus a knight: one Conradus an Almaine brought it into Rome: William Caxton of London mercer brought it into England about the yeare 1471: and first practised the same in the abbie of saint Peter at Westminster; after which time it was likewise practised in the abbies of S. Augustine at Canturburie, saint Albons, and other monasteries of England. (648–9)

The passage tells a clear history of the book: printing is invented in 1459 (or ‘about this time’) and comes to England in 1471, ‘after which time’ it is further disseminated across a number of monasteries. The dates are fairly close to our own understanding, which posits the invention of print somewhat earlier, after 1450, and records Caxton importing this technology into England somewhat later, in 1476, as an urban experience. By any reckoning printing, even more fantastically than the paper mill (which seems to have come to England only in 1495), occurs after the events of 2 *Henry VI*. Moreover, that it should be *inserted* into Cade’s speech in the Folio is at odds with our sense of that text’s authority. Madeline Doran and Peter Alexander both concluded that the Quarto is a memorial reconstruction of a more authoritative text, in part, because of its carelessness with historical detail. This argument presents the Folio as a general straightening out of the plays, one that asserts authorial control in proportion to historical linearity. The Cade passage above reasserts a recursive sense of history into the midst of such a process, making the play’s book history less historically cogent even as the Folio reorganizes the Henry trilogy in sequential continuity. Breaching the plot’s temporal frame, the discrepancy brings Cade’s critique of textual authority to a larger reflection on the constitution of historical authority itself. That is, the play presents a world defined by its textuality, which it illustrates by constructing and destroying its characters through texts. In the main, it restrains this process from the backbone of chronological history, preferring to tell the past as a progressive story. But throughout the Cade section, when authority is most under assault, it abandons chronology and seeks out a more thematic organization for the historical past, one that doubles back on chronology to link Cade with Tyler and Straw. The Folio’s particular revision around printing takes this reorganizing sensibility one step further by calling into question the textual authority of textual history even as it consolidates the plays in a progressive sequence overall.

Wrapped up in the history of printing, the emergence of Shakespeare’s work in print, the relationship between texts and authority, and the constitution of

the past, Cade's history of printing offers a supremely self-reflexive moment. I suggest that such self-reflection is implicit in the history of print. Caxton discusses the development of printing in his 1480 *Chronicles of England*. This text is based on the *Brut*, which tells the history of England from its legendary founding through to 1333, variously extended in manuscript.¹³ Caxton added a 1419–61 continuation, which he also used for his 'liber ultimas' of his 1482 *Polychronicon*.¹⁴ The entry on printing thus presents a uniquely self-reflexive moment—a historical account of printing written by the first English printer and presented in the first printed history of England—and if we turn to the actual page of the *Chronicles of England* on which it appears, folio page Y1^v, we can better appreciate both the self-conscious nature of fifteenth-century literary culture and its methods of reproduction (see Figure 2). At first glance, the page seems entirely un-self-conscious about history. Beginning with a chapter heading that focuses on a particular moment in the Wars of the Roses, it quickly splinters into the chronicle form: here four great fish are landed between 'Eerethe' and London (notably, a 'marine'—a seahorse or walrus¹⁵—a swordfish, and two whales), there Lord Egremont is imprisoned and Warwick and his wife take possession of Calais, somewhere else there is a miraculous intervention on the part of some angels in the war against the Turks, now a prison break occurs in Newgate, now an earthquake in Naples, and then the Wars of the Roses continue on the next page with Warwick, York, and Salisbury's alliance. Between Warwick's trip to Calais and the war with the Turks, apparently, both monastic reform and printing occur:

Aboute this tyme was a grete reformation of many monasteries of religion in diuerse parties of the world | which were reformed after the first institucion and continued in many places | Also aboute this tyme the crafte of enprinting was first founde in Magunce in Almayne | whiche craft is mnltiplied thurgh the world in many places | and bookes bene had grete chepe and in grete nombre by cause of the same craft[.]

Taken with the rest of the page, the commentary presents two more atomized events in the overall list, associated with the rest not by analysis, but by proximity

¹³ See Lister Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle* (Tempe, AZ: MRTS, 1998), 6.

¹⁴ Matheson has stated the case for Caxton's authorship in 'Printer and Scribe: Caxton, the *Polychronicon*, and the *Brut*', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 593–614.

¹⁵ Glossed by A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley, *The Great Chronicle of London* (1938; rpt. in micro-print, Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1983), 426.

Howe the lord Egremond Was take by the Erle of Salisburie sones
 And of the robbing of sand Wygh
 Capitulum ducentesimo lviij.

His yere Were taken iij. grete fisshes hit Were Cereth & lbiij
 don, that one Was called more marine, the second a Werd
 fisshe, and the othir t Weyne Were Wales In this same
 yere for certayne affayres done in the northcontre hit Were the lord
 Egremond, and the Erle of Salisburie sones, the said lord Egre
 mond, Whom they had taken Was condemned in a grete somme of
 money to the said Erle of Salisbury, and therfor compled to pri
 son in Newgate in london, Where Whan he had be a certayne space he
 brake the prison and iij. prisoners With hym and escaped, & Went
 his Way, Also this yere the Erle of Warrewyke and his Wyfe Went
 to Calays With a faire felawship and toke possession of his offi
 ce, About this tyme Was a grete reformation of many monasteri
 es of religion in diuerse parties of the World, Which Were reformed
 after the first institution and continued in many places, Also a
 bout this tyme the craft of enprinting Was first founde in Ma
 gunce in Almayne, Whiche craft is multiplied thurgh the World
 in many places, and bookes bene had grete chepe and in grete nom
 bre by cause of the same craft, This same yere Was a grete bataille
 in the marches hit Were hungerie and turkye at a place called sep
 tedrade, Where innumerable turkes Were slayne more by miracle
 than by mannes honde, For only the honde of god smote them, seint
 Johan of capistrane Was there present & prouoked the cristen peple
 beying thenne aferd after to pursue the turkes, Where an infinite
 multitude Were slayne and destitued, The turkes said that a grete
 nombre of armed men folowed them, that they Were aferd to turne
 agayne, they Were holy angells, This same yere the prisoners
 of Newgate in london brake their prison & Went Upon the leedes &
 fought ayenst them of the Cite & kept the gate a longe While, but at
 the last the toun gate the prison on them, and than they Were put
 in fetters & prons & Were sore punysshed, in ensample of othir In
 this yere also Was a grete earthquake in Naples in so moch p ther
 perished xl. m. peple that sank there in to the erthe, Jam in the yere
 xxvj. seint Osmond, somtyme bisschop of Salisbury Was canon
 sed at Rome by Pope Caliste, And the xvij. day of July he Was
 translated at Salisbury by the Erchebisschop of Caunterbury
 and many othir bisschopes And in August after Sir Piers

Figure 2. William Caxton, *Chronicles of England* (Westminster, 1480), Y1^v, STC 9991. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

and accretion. Indeed, the page as a whole seems at odds with itself, the overwhelming solidity of its black rectangle of ink opposed to the fragmentary connections it develops between events. Yet, given the compression of the chronicle format, the passage is surprisingly insistent upon the profound nature of this 'reformation' and 'the crafte of enprinting'. These are both 'grete' changes to existing social practices, 'the first institucion' and the existing book economy; both, too, are explicitly of global proportions and in this differ from the discrete catching of fish or even the Wars of the Roses themselves, which are presented as of more local consequence. The explicit grouping of these two events, concerned as they are with discourses of belief and communication, suggests in some oblique way a potent if inarticulate relationship between them. In this, Caxton's account appears simultaneously knowing and arbitrary, paradoxically aware of the historical changes it records and opaque to any causal connection. This awkward combination of insight and naïveté is captured on Caxton's page in the misplaced 'n' in his statement that print is 'mnltiplied thurgh the world', which defines one of print's very first moments of self-reflection as a typo.

This paradox should not, however, distract us from the governing condition at work in the passage, reproduction, which it illustrates on at least three levels. First, the *Chronicles of England* is a reproduction of a manuscript, an extension of scribal practices. Caxton derived his continuation from two sources: the *Fasciculus temporum*, written by Werner Rolewinck and printed by Caxton's long-time associate Johannes Veldener in Cologne in 1474 and then again in Louvain in 1475, and the *London Chronicles*, a variegated group of urban and secular fifteenth-century chronicles organized by mayoral year, both of which he adapted to the *Brut* format.¹⁶ Two surviving *London Chronicles*, BL MS Cotton Vitellius A xvi and the *Great Chronicle of London* (MS Guildhall 3313), also record the invention of printing.¹⁷ The *Great London Chronicle*'s comment is similar to Caxton's: it enters printing in 1457, nesting it under the four great fish and inserting it between Warwick's trip to Calais and the consolidation of the Yorkist alliance in 1458: 'Also this yere began the Crafte of Enprenting of bookis which was ffoundyn In A toune callid Magounce in Almayngne.'¹⁸ In this, originality is the wrong

¹⁶ Mary-Rose McLaren counts forty-four extant manuscripts of the *London Chronicles*, but speculates 'that in the mid fifteenth century there were almost certainly hundreds of *London Chronicles* in circulation' (*The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth-Century: A Revolution in English Writing* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 3).

¹⁷ C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 99–100.

¹⁸ Thomas and Thornley, *The Great Chronicle of London*, 191.

measure both of print technology and of Caxton's writing. Print history's commentary on itself illustrates that it is not intellectually exclusive of manuscript sensibilities, and in fact a number of manuscripts were copied out from Caxton's text.¹⁹ The fifteenth century's mode of literary production is reproduction, and this brings manuscript and print into a tight relationship.

If there is any difference between manuscript and print beyond the particular mechanics of composition and impression, it lies in print's ability to energize the reproductive system. Thus, my second point: print is exponential. That is, though the *Chronicles of England* follows manuscript practice, the influx of volume provided by print technology insists it develops according to a radical curve: print keeps on reproducing, not just books but its own terms for greater reproduction, which in turn allows for the reproduction of even more books at even more locations. This is borne out by the *Chronicles of England* itself. That is, the *Chronicles'* importance lies not simply in its popularity—remaining in 181 English manuscripts, 49 Anglo-Norman manuscripts, and about 20 Latin manuscripts, the *Brut's* popularity in the late Middle Ages, as Matheson points out, was exceeded only by the Wycliffite Bible—so much as in its structural position within an exponentially expanding reproductive sequence.²⁰ For Caxton's *Chronicles of England* was reproduced on a massive scale. Not only did his continuation serve as the base text for his addition to the *Polychronicon*, from which Caxton also spun off his short *Discripcion of Britayne* in 1480, but he reprinted the *Chronicles* in 1482.²¹ In 1483, the St Albans Schoolmaster printer revised this text for his own edition, the *Cronicles of Englonde with the Frute of Timis*, and following him, William de Machlinia produced a copy of Caxton's version from his shop in London in or around 1485. In 1493 Gerard de Leew, working in Antwerp, reprinted the *Chronicles* as the *Cronycles of the Londe of Englund* for importation into England, and shortly after taking control of Caxton's Westminster shop, Wynkyn de Worde reprinted the Schoolmaster printer's version in 1497, pairing it with the *Discripcion of Britayne*.²² Assuming, as is fairly accepted, a print run of 500 copies per edition, the *Chronicles of England* circulated in approximately 3,000 copies by 1500. Even if we discount this number—a

¹⁹ See Matheson, 'Printer and Scribe', 595, 598, 609, and *The Prose Brut*, 70–1, 157–72.

²⁰ Matheson, *The Prose Brut*, 8.

²¹ The 1482 *Chronicles* is STC 9992; the 1480 *Discripcion of Britayne* is 13440a.

²² St Albans, *Cronicles of Englonde with the Frute of Timis* (STC 9995); William de Machlinia (9993); Gerard de Leew, *Cronycles of the Londe of Englund* (9994); Wynkyn de Worde (9996).

dangerous proposition considering that de Leew was willing to produce the text for importation—the six editions insist upon a large number of individual copies. Potentially, the amount of books is much greater. Nevertheless, the books continued: de Worde reprinted his matched set in 1502, 1515, 1520, and 1528, as did Julian Notary in 1504 and 1515, and Richard Pynson in 1510.²³ These statistics pose a fundamental question about the relationship between print and social change: where did the demand for English history come from? The question is not rhetorical: manuscript production could, apparently, already meet a demand for hundreds of copies of the *Brut* and *London Chronicles*; how, in the space of five years, could this demand increase almost fivefold? Obviously, our own fondness for an English fifteenth century of booklessness is not prepared to theorize such change. So, we have no ready answer for the notion that supply itself could drive demand so powerfully, for the drastic changes in literacy, distribution, storage, wholesaling, and even the conversation habits of individuals over dinner, that such an amount of books implies. I argue that one answer lies in Caxton's commentary on print, which—in contrast to the *Great Chronicle of London*—emphasizes that print multiplies books as well as knowledge. My third point, then, is that Caxton's comments on printing are about the power of reproduction, about the way objects and knowledge can expand at a nonlinear rate that is neither progressive nor periodic. Print is revolutionary, perhaps, but not as a break from the past, so much as a multiplication of its very terms. As manuscript continuation, as exponential system, as nonlinear history, fifteenth-century literary culture may well be cross-cut by a number of paradoxes, but this does not mean that it does not have some sense of the process that defines it: reproduction.

Reproduction inheres in the sixteenth-century chronicles' presentation of the history of print, even as these chronicles seem conceptually distant from fifteenth-century writing. The page from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England* offers a convenient example (Figure 1). In place of whales and earthquakes, the Holinshed Syndicate presents an orderly narrative of the Wars of the Roses carefully calibrated to reflect chronological progression. The entry on printing is particularly saturated with this overall interest in ascribing events to specific moments in time: the year 1459 is cleanly separated from the previous year by

²³ De Worde 1502 (*STC* 9997), 1515 (10000.5), 1520 (10001), 1528 (10002); Notary, 1504 (9998), 1515 (10000); and Pynson, 1510 (9999).

a marginal notation, the passage on printing is set off yet again by a paragraph-mark and another marginal comment, and the founding of print itself is separated from its specific arrival in England in 1471. Indeed, there is something in the page layout—its two narrow columns, its orderly paragraphs all carefully indented, its delicate marginalia—that contributes to this chronological clarity with striking contrast to Caxton's block of text. Yet, the closer we look at the sixteenth-century chronicles the more they appear indebted to fifteenth-century manuscripts: Holinshed's *Chronicles* in fact sandwiches the story of print between Warwick's journey to Calais and his union with York and Salisbury. Similarly, Richard Pynson's 1516 *Newe Cronycles of Englande and of Fraunce*, reprinted by William Rastell in 1533 as *Fabyans Cronycle*, actually reproduces the entry on printing quite clearly, down to the four fish (now 'wonderfull fyshys') and cites the *Polychronicon* as a source, one which we have seen reprints Caxton's *Chronicles of England*.²⁴ Edward Hall follows fifteenth-century historiography as well: under his entry around the year 1458 he lists the conflict between Egremont and Salisbury, Salisbury's escape from imprisonment, and the invention of print: 'In which season, the craft of Printyng was first inuented in the cite of Mens in Germanie, to the great furtheraunce of all persons, desiryng knowledge or thyrstyng for literature,' which is followed by the pact between York, Salisbury, and Warwick.²⁵ To the best of my knowledge there is nothing about the year 1459, about Egremont's escape, or about the Yorkist coalition, that insists upon the inclusion of printing at this point. The year 1459 is an arbitrary date; rather, it is not arbitrary at all: it reveals that early modern printing is reliant upon medieval scribal reproduction for its internal organization.

In truth, it cannot be otherwise: the *Great Chronicle of London* was owned by John Foxe and John Stow, a significant member of the Holinshed Syndicate responsible for preparing the 1587 revision. Both Stow and Foxe thought they were working with the manuscript version of Fabyan's *Newe Cronycles*; Stow in particular referred to it as 'Fabian's MS' and marked it, MS Vitellius A.xvi (the other manuscript to include mention of printing), and the other *London*

²⁴ See the *Newe Cronycles of Englande and of Fraunce* (London, Richard Pynson, 1516), DD.iii. (*STC* 10659), and the attributed and expanded version, *Fabyans Cronycle Newly Prynted* (London: William Rastell, 1533), kk.iii. (*STC* 10660).

²⁵ Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (London: Richard Grafton, 1548), Ee.iii. (*STC* 12722).

Chronicles he used for his various printed histories.²⁶ These manuscript origins structure the pages of Holinshed's *Chronicles*: they are intellectually present in the choice of events on the page, they are aesthetically evoked through the black-letter type that emulates the *bastarda* scribal hand Caxton used to introduce print, and they formulate the very terms by which early modern history reflects on its own history of printing. This is an important reminder, for it is still a commonplace that print introduces fixity to an otherwise fluid medium: witness D. R. Woolf's recent assertion in *Reading History in Early Modern England* that 'print made possible the establishment and reproduction of accurate texts, but it also prohibited further substantive intervention in those texts.'²⁷ Print has no special relationship to fixity other than in its type-casting techniques, in its paper-drying process, and in certain mechanical adjustments made to the form. Rather, it is but one technological element in an overall mode of production, which incorporates various manuscript practices, such as collation, rubrication, and book binding. The anonymous scribes of the *London Chronicles* and the *Brut* manuscripts, Caxton, Fabyan, Grafton, Hall, and the Holinshed Syndicate, all participate in this common system of textual reproduction. The pages they produce speak of the continued structural presence of fifteenth-century manuscript practices in early modern texts, not simply in their aesthetic arrangement, but in their report of the way their makers think about textual production, which appears deeply contingent on the past.

In sum, the terms of chronicle history change between 1480 and 1587. The stories told by Caxton and the Holinshed Syndicate are vastly different, the one governed by the paradoxes of reproduction, the other by the exigencies of a chronological narrative of political events. Though this chronological narrative appears linear and progressive, it is nevertheless structured on multiple levels by manuscript production protocols. In the particular instance of the history of print, this asserts a *durable formal structure* within the chronicles' very account of print history. The affinity is obscured by the sixteenth-century chroniclers and antiquarians, such as Hall and Stow, who assert their chronological distance from the fifteenth-century past as a conceptual distance, and by sixteenth-century poets, such as Sidney, who fashion analogies of historical rupture that elide the fifteenth century into a painful adolescence, one by

²⁶ The relationship between *The Great Chronicle of London* and Fabyan's work remains unclear; see McLaren, *The London Chronicles*, 26–8.

²⁷ D. R. Woolf, *Reading History* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 54.

implication best left forgotten. Shakespeare's Jack Cade shows us this obscurantist rhetoric. He decries printing—though according to the historical accounts that contrive his identity he should not know what it is—and the moment we acknowledge this and step out of the progressive sequence of historical narrative to recognize him as a recursive construction, we also become aware that the teleology of print history is not linear, that in fact the most self-reflexive moment in the history of printing is ironically the most derivative of manuscript culture. In my view, the Folio's *Second Part of Henry the Sixth* can tease out these problems of the history of the book to a greater extent than *The Contention* precisely because the Folio's structure—its use of a generic framework, its insistence on chronological sequence—subordinates the past to a greater extent overall. In both cases, the plays' insist that textual authority is relentlessly double: the very terms that allow it to construct authority as self-aware also undermine that authority, and so at its most absurd, it launches its most sweeping critique.

My argument, then, is that the notion of recursion allows us to conceive of the centrality of fifteenth-century writing to the early modern canon. We can see this strikingly in another self-reflexive moment of textual origins connecting Caxton, printing, and Shakespeare: the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*. Originally printed in Bruges in 1473 or 1474, the *Recuyell* is the first text printed in English. Based on the Burgundian writer, Raoul Lefèvre's expansion of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* and Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis troiae*, it is the definitive prose collection of the three destructions of Troy. Caxton translated Lefèvre's work, and included an autobiographical preface, prologue, and two epilogues that recount his translation of the text and introduce the printed book to an English audience. The *Recuyell* was continually reprinted in England, running to fifteen editions by the end of the eighteenth century. There are three sixteenth-century editions: one by de Worde in 1502 (with a 1503 variant), one by William Copland in 1553, and one by Creede and Simmes in 1596/97.²⁸ De Worde's 1502 edition introduces a number of significant changes to Caxton's original: he creates a title page, adds woodcuts, edits and defers Caxton's initial preface, inserts an extended table at the beginning of the text, and merges Caxton's three

²⁸ Caxton's text is listed in the *STC* as 15375. Wynkyn de Worde's 1502 reprint is *STC* 15376 and his 1503 edition is *STC* 15377, William Copland's is *STC* 15378, and the Creede and Simmes edition is *STC* 15379.

books into one. In unifying the books around his opening table, de Worde also eliminates Caxton's prologue and two epilogues on the birth of printing, instead finishing the text with his variant of Caxton's printer's device and a colophon identifying his shop. In this mark we can read some of de Worde's sensibility, for he has created a second edition, one that recognizably bears Caxton's imprinter but no longer narrates the beginning of printing. Indeed, the very mark that illustrates Caxton's initials is now anchored by de Worde's name and aesthetized through an elaborate surround. De Worde, an innovative and ambitious publisher, seems to take for granted that the *Recuyell* is a Caxton and to offer his version as also a de Worde.

De Worde issued a variant of this edition in 1503, but the next significant edition is by William Copland in 1553. Copland's father (or perhaps father-in-law), Robert Copland, worked with de Worde as a translator, editor, and contract printer, eventually opening his own shop. Copland diverges from de Worde's model by restoring Caxton's paratextual matter, converting the initial preface into a title page, and revising de Worde's table into smaller inserts at the end of books 2 and 3. This move reasserts the major divisions between the books overall, and so Copland returns Caxton's first-person epilogues as well. The restoration suggests Copland had access to one of Caxton's Bruges editions, now eighty years old and created his text as a kind of homage. If de Worde's edition is continuous with Caxton's own, Copland's is a modulated return to the past, positioning it as distanced but nevertheless authoritative. The pages themselves echo this plan, for they use Roman headers to guide the reader through the black-letter type. Though different, both de Worde and Copland preserve, through either device or prose, what Lotte Hellinga calls Caxton's 'personal mark on the books he published that proved to be inimitable'.²⁹ Into the mid-sixteenth century, then, the *Recuyell* represents this inimitability as either a continuation of or return to Caxton.

The next edition, printed by Creede and Simmes in 1596/7, departs from these strategies. Visually, the title page presents the text as a modern achievement. Here the information in Copland's revised preface is transformed into a monumental page, almost an engraving on paper (Figure 3). Here, too, Caxton's manifold roles are divided: he is named a translator—'*Translated out of French into English, by W. Caxton*'—but not an editor or a printer. The text itself

²⁹ Lotte Hellinga, *The Catalogue of Books Printed in the XVth Century Now in the British Library, BMC Part XI* (The Netherlands: Hes and De Graaf, 2007), 5.

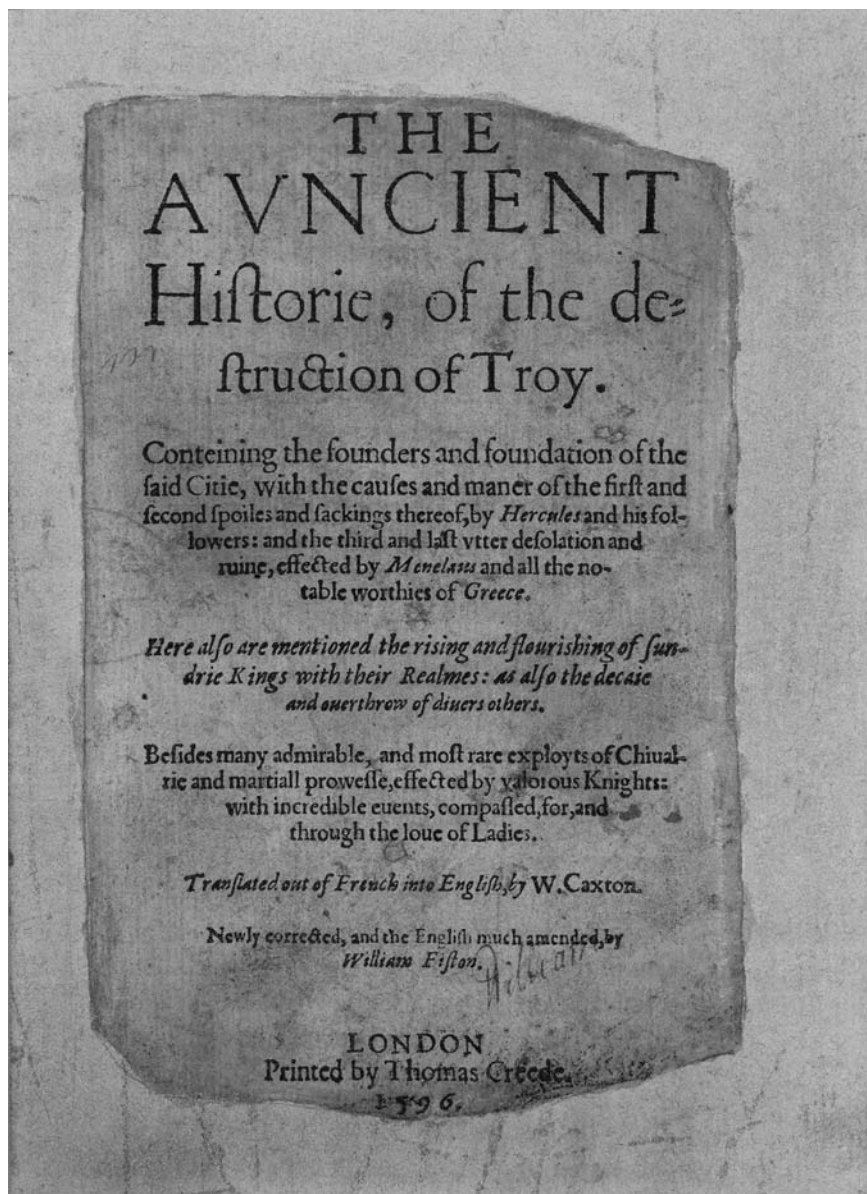


Figure 3. *The Auntient Historie of the Destruction of Troy* (London, 1596/97), t.p., STC 15379. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

is ‘Newly corrected, and the English much amended, by *William Fiston*,’ and Creede is its printer, a role divided yet again in book 3, which has a separate title announcing Simmes as the printer for that book. Further, the edition is fronted by an opening epistle, ‘The Printers to the curteous Reader’, which pulls together these various agents into a single voice. The passage concludes as follows:

And whereas before time, the Translator William Caxton, being (as it seemeth) no Englishman, had left very many words mere French, and sundry sentences so improperly Englished, that it was hard to understand, we have caused them to bee made plainer English: and if leiure had served, wee would haue had the same in better refined phrases, and certaine names that bee amisse, conferred with Authours, and made right. (a.iv)

The passage presents Phiston’s work as the recovery of a text from obscurity. In this, it is reminiscent of William Thynne’s assessment in his 1532 edition of Chaucer’s *Workes*, of Chaucer’s own English as ‘rude and imperfite’; it is reminiscent, too, of Robert Crowley’s contemporary discussion of the language of *Piers Plowman* as ‘somewhat darcke’.³⁰ So it is tempting to read the commentary as simply evidence of historical distance, an indication that Caxton’s language had become remote by 1596. Yet in those sixteenth-century editions, *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* are taken to be of the past, but nevertheless significantly English, and as such their editors endeavor to recover them from history itself, to make a long leap back to an earlier moment of origins in English literary history. The discussion of the *Recuyell* is fundamentally different, for it argues that the text must not be recovered from history, but from Caxton: so it brands Caxton’s translation ‘improper’ and ‘hard to understand’, so it asserts that the text is filled with corruptions, and so it concludes that the language suggests Caxton was no Englishman. The critique is one of authority, not of history, and accordingly, Caxton is far from inimitable—he is irredeemable.

Again, it is tempting to read the assessment of Caxton as simply an effect of historical distance: that by 1596 the autobiographical material so finely placing Caxton as an Englishman, so clearly articulating his combined roles as translator, writer, financier, and printer had been lost, filtered out by de Worde’s revisions; that the ‘W. C.’ of Caxton’s trademark device, no doubt so resonate once, had become an empty sign to the sixteenth-century editor. Looking

³⁰ *The Workes of Geffray Chaucer* (London: Thomas Godfray, 1532), Aii.^v (STC 5068); *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* (London: Richard Grafton, 1550), *.ii.^v (STC 19906).

through the text, however, it is clear that Phiston used Copland's edition, not de Worde's. We can see this in the way the book divisions fall so as to break the text into separate units, and in the way the tables appear at the end of each book. Phiston had access to all of Caxton's material: to his autobiographical prologue, to his careful explanation of his relationship with Margaret of York, to his narrative of the birth of English printing. Phiston actually includes lightly revised selections of this material, entirely unavailable in de Worde's version. So in the last pages of the second book, Caxton speaks to the reader through Phiston's hand, telling him or her that

And as for the third booke which treateth of the generall and last destruction of Troy: It needeth not to translate it into English, forasmuch as that worshipfull and religious man John Lidgate monk of Burie did translate it but late, after whose worke, I feare to take upon me (that am not worthy to beare this penner and inke-horne after him) to meddle at'all in that worke. But yet, forasmuche as I am bound to obey and please my said ladies good grace: and also that his worke is in rime: and as farre as I knowe it is not had in prose in our tongue . . . I haue deliberated in my selfe, for the contemplation of my said redoubted Lady, to take this labour in hand. (427)

In 'our tongue'—the narrative announces to its reader that Caxton must be an Englishman; moreover, it offers John Lydgate as a clear literary precedent for Caxton and by extension for Phiston. Phiston works more quickly with the epilogue to the third book, leaving much of the discussion of Lady Margaret intact, but editing Caxton's comments on print down to a single phrase: 'I have caused this book to be Printed: that being published the more plentuously, mens turns may be the more easily served' (603). Here the one actual moment of origins in the history of English printing—the moment Caxton decides to print the *Recuyell*—is no origin at all. Caxton seems no Englishman, the birth of printing is simply publishing. Phiston tells a book history replete with citations of Lydgate and tales of female patronage—and thus detailed and knowing—but also resolute that the past is no authority for the present, if leisure had served he might have revised it further still. Here is a literary history of influence and denial, one in which fifteenth-century literary culture actively inflects how modernity is written, even as it is alienated into history.

Linearity premised on break, continuation as revolution—this is a print history that loops backward to find its origins in the first years of print, all the while constructing this period as without authority. Such an ambivalent relationship to history textures the ensuing editions of the *Recuyell*, all of which rely on the Creede and Simmes' edition and carry some version of its epistle.

With Barnard Alsop's 1617 edition, these texts bear a title page announcing them 'corrected and much amended' and numbering them in sequence. This numbering suggests a linear narrative of book history, a reckoning of time and books as progressively improving. Within such a chronology lies contradiction, however, for Alsop does not claim his edition is the first, but the fifth. Thus, though it derives from Copland's 1553 edition, it traces its origins back to de Worde's 1502 edition or the variant. *Knowingness*: to make this count, Alsop had to be aware of all the editions before him back to de Worde's. Such an engagement with the *Recuyell* is not exclusive to a few printers, antiquarians, and bibliophiles of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: the *Recuyell* formed a literary source for the Troy story for early modern prose works such as Robert Greene's *Censure to Philautus*, George Peele's *Tale of Troye*, and Thomas Heywood's *Troia Britanica*. Major early modern dramatic works relied upon it as a significant source such as Heywood's *Iron Age* and, again, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*.³¹ The early modern *Recuyell of the Hystories of Troye* embodies a narrative in which the past is no model for the present but is nevertheless an integral part of contemporary literary culture. Reading and writing: the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the medieval and the modern, are locked in process that transcends any simple notion of historical break.

Books offer literary history by other terms. Renewed and reprinted, they are material objects that speak the past across generations of readers. On the one hand, this suggests a chronological progression of ideas bound by time in which one literary movement follows the next in exactly the way a new edition supplants an older one. In this regard, literary history appears intimately connected to historical period, emerging in concert with political and social history. On the other hand, it recalls that books are transcendent of local history and stubbornly insistent on their terms through their survival in the hands of readers. Case in point: Shakespeare did not use Phiston's *Recuyell* for his *Troilus and Cressida*, but instead relied on an older edition, either Copland's or Caxton's. Hence literary history is paradoxical in a number of ways: it contains paradoxes, such as the odd combination of knowingness and ignorance represented by Caxton's errant 'n', and it is told as paradoxical. We can simplify these paradoxes if we so choose, imagining a history of the book and author in which print technology asserts an absolute change over the object of the book,

³¹ See John S. P. Tatlock, 'The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan Literature, Especially in Shakespeare and Heywood', *PMLA* 30 (1915), 673–770.

and in which historical periods are discrete in much the same way that new editions mark an advancement on their predecessors. Alternately, and more wisely in my view, we can acknowledge a process of textual reproduction that is involute: texts do not evolve in a linear pattern, they are colored by separate traditions, corruptions, and interpretations, and they continue to broadcast their influence long after they have been replaced by newer versions. This complexity is true for authorship and authority as well, which seem less to move progressively toward ideal embodiments than to loop back around to earlier models, forging alliances across time rather than simply moving through it. Such a literary history suggests not so much chronological linearity punctuated by a break into a new historical period, as the continued presence of the past for English writing: a recursive origin.

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Chantry, Chronicle, Cockpit

Henry V and the Forms of History

Brian Walsh

In representing the reigns of English monarchs from the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries on the late-sixteenth-century stage, Shakespeare helped to define the past as 'other' from the present. While Shakespeare's history plays do not aim toward periodization in our sense of the term, his so-called first and second tetralogies do isolate a span of time characterized within the plays through a range of representational strategies, as distinct from the performative present of the 1590s. *Henry V*, the play that caps Shakespeare's exploration of the pre-Tudor English monarchy, stands out in this regard, and is thus the most inviting site in his canon to examine Shakespeare as a historical thinker. The play, particularly through its Chorus figure, is famous for explicitly commenting on the practice of historical representation, and is the basis here for my investigation of how Shakespeare represented the relation between his Elizabethan present and what has come to be called the medieval past.¹

To say that Shakespeare characterized the past as 'other' is not to suggest that he regarded the Middle Ages as inferior to his own time. Nor do I argue here that the kind of historical consciousness evinced in *Henry V* should be read

¹ *Henry V* was published in three quarto versions (1600, 1602, and 1619), none of which contained the Chorus's lines, before its appearance with the Chorus's part in the 1623 First Folio. My discussion of the play assumes that *Henry V* was performed in the late 1590s with the Chorus's lines.

as somehow more sophisticated than a medieval sense of the past. Scholars of medieval literature have for some time argued against the tendency among early modernists to portray the Middle Ages as a stagnant, intellectual backwater superseded by the complexity and vigor of the Renaissance. In Lee Patterson's words, 'medieval pre-modernity has with few exceptions been experienced by modernity as "Gothic"—obscure, difficult, strange, alien.'² As Patterson points out, this view began in the Renaissance itself, especially among the Italian humanists who sought to distinguish themselves from their most immediate predecessors. I would not associate Shakespeare with this trend. I am instead arguing that for Shakespeare, the Middle Ages are not so much 'obscure' as they are enticing. It is a commonplace that Renaissance intellectuals longed for some connection to the classical past. Petrarch's letters to ancient authors express this longing in explicit terms. Shakespeare's history plays tapped into an apparent desire on the part of Elizabethan theatergoers to gain an imaginative experience of the 'middle' era. Shakespeare recognizes the desire for such an imaginative experience, and offers in response to this recognition a consciousness of the past that is defined less by its exemplarity or its place in a typological schema than by the sheer fact of its difference from the present.³

The distance effect Shakespeare creates in *Henry V* is not pejorative, then, but the affirmation of temporality. Specifically, in *Henry V*, he recognizes that there have been changes in the way that the past is recorded and circulated between the time of Henry V and his own era. Shakespeare organizes his recognition of these changes around three key developments of the sixteenth century, developments that undeniably mark major breaks from the world of the early fifteenth century when Henry reigned: the Reformation, the advent of the printing press and its role in historical writing, and the dawn of the professional theater and development of the history play as a major component of that theater. *Henry V* is thick with meditations on the discourse of history. I have perforce selected as the basis of my analysis here a few key scenes that correspond to those three indices of change: first, Henry's remarks about funding chantries in memory of King Richard II, a distinctly pre-Reformation mode of marking and articulating the past; second, the Chorus's reference to

² Lee Patterson, 'On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies', *Speculum* 65 (1990), 87–108, esp. 92.

³ On this point, see David Quint, '“Alexander the Pig”: Shakespeare on History and Poetry', *boundary 2* 10:3 (Spring 1982), 49–67.

written versions of the Henry V story that remind audiences of the chronicle tradition and its development, enabled by the emergence of a print culture in England in the late fifteenth century; and third, the commoners' discussion of the death of Falstaff, a scene that, through the characters present and the figure of Falstaff invoked, affirms the theatrical setting of the play, and thus the playhouse itself as a novel site of historical representation.

Henry V accounts for a variety of forms of historical awareness extant before its own time. This self-consciousness about the constitution and dissemination of historical knowledge is the central feature of the Shakespearean *ars historica* we can construct from this play. Change is highlighted, in other words, not as an occasion to make moral pronouncements or to convey a general sense of worldly mutability, but to examine the *concept* of history and transformations to how the past is represented and circulated. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare historicizes practices of historiography, and in so doing, demonstrates a rupture in English historical culture between what we now call the Middle Ages and his own late-sixteenth-century moment.

Chantry: Citing the Pre-Reformation Imaginary

In the anonymously-authored *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, a play from the repertory of the Queen's Men that was on the London stages at least as late as 1587, King Henry IV offers the crown to the Prince of Wales. The King woefully admits 'God knows, my son, how hardly I came by it, and how hardly I have maintained it,' to which the Prince replies: 'Howsoever you came by it, I know not; but now I have it from you, and from you I will keep it.'⁴ The Prince claims ignorance of his father's usurpation. He never mentions Richard II or meditates on the direct antecedents of his inheritance.⁵ One of Shakespeare's great innovations from the Henry V story as told in *The Famous Victories* is his rendering of Henry's conscience,

⁴ *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, 8.56–9. Quoted from *The Oldcastle Controversy*: Sir John Oldcastle, Part I and *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1991).

⁵ Contrast the remarks of Shakespeare's Hal to his father, speaking of the crown, in the parallel scene in *2 Henry IV*: 'You won it, wore, kept it, gave it me; | Then plain and right must my possession be' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.5.221–2, emphasis added).

which, albeit briefly aired, includes a specific nagging memory about the events of English history that have enabled his reign. The King prays:

K. HENRY Not to-day, O Lord,
 O, not to-day, think not upon the fault
 My father made in compassing the crown!
 I Richard's body have interred new,
 And on it have bestowed more contrite tears,
 Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
 Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
 Who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up
 Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
 Two chauntries, where the sad and solemn priests
 Sing still for Richard's soul. (4.1.292–302)

My interests here elide the considerable psychological complexity of Henry's crisis in order to focus on the specific way this moment invokes a sense of historical periods. Henry claims to have 'interred new' the body of Richard II, and also refers here to arranging for two related modes of intercession on behalf of Richard's soul, both of them suppressed and out of use by the 1590s. The first is the payment of indigent people to pray for a departed benefactor.⁶ The second is the Chantry system, that is, chapels funded by usually wealthy testators to be dedicated to intercessory prayers and songs on the departed one's behalf spoken and sung by actual priests.⁷ The major English chronicle accounts of Henry's reign that pre-date Shakespeare's play all make note of the conspicuous re-burial of Richard at Westminster Abbey shortly after Henry's coronation in 1413.⁸ While they do write about the re-burial of Richard, neither Hall nor Holinshed, the most prominent prose works normally identified as source material for *Henry V*,

⁶ Evidence for this practice can be seen, for instance, in the case of John Estbury, who had founded an almshouse in Berkshire. Upon his death in 1507, the poor men who found comfort there were required to say daily prayers in church to his memory, and also to go to his tomb every day to recite additional prayers. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 328. See also Alan Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), 67, for more on the role of the poor in chantry intercessory practices.

⁷ See Kreider, *English Chantries*, especially 1–71.

⁸ Most of these chronicles emphasize that this was done by Henry out of a sense of piety and remorse over the death of Richard. Juliet Barker suggests that publicly parading Richard's body to a new tomb at Westminster worked also to quell conspiracy theories that Richard still lived. See Barker, *Agincourt: The King, the Campaign, the Battle* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 74–5.

mention the intercessory rituals Henry claims he arranged for Richard's soul. Nor can this information be found, for instance, in the chronicles of Richard Grafton, another popular and prolific chronicler of the mid-sixteenth century.⁹

William Caxton's late-fifteenth-century continuation of the *Brut*, known popularly as 'Caxton's Chronicle', does note that Henry ordered the lighting of 'tapers' at Richard's tomb, as well as his directive that masses and songs, connected with poor relief, be dedicated to Richard's name. The description of Henry's efforts on behalf of Richard's soul in the 1480 *Chronicles* is implicated in a moment before the break with Rome. Caxton describes how Henry had 'sente to Rome' to ask advice on what to do about his father's murder of Richard, 'For which offence' the *Chronicles* go on to say, 'the Pope our holy fadre enjoined him [Henry] to make hym [Richard] be p[rayed]ed for perpetually.'¹⁰ This narrative of events in almost identical wording can be found also in Caxton's 1482 printing of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* and subsequent editions of that work. In Robert Fabyan's 1516 *Chronicle*, specific reference to the Pope is omitted, but here we read of Henry's order for tapers to be burned at Richard's tomb 'whyle the world endureth', as well as an order that 'one daye in the weke a solempne Dirige, and vppon the morowe a masse of Requiem' should be sung for Richard, and that after such masses, money should be 'gyuen weekly unto poore people'.¹¹ Briefer reference to these practices, in sparser form, can be found also in John Stow's 1592 *Annales of England*; this is the only post-Reformation potential source for Henry VI have found that mentions them.¹² Fabyan, Stow, and these other sources do not specifically mention the word 'chantry', although the allusion

⁹ Geoffrey Bullough asserts Holinshed to be the main source for *Henry V*, with some recourse to Hall. Bullough also says, without elaboration, that Shakespeare may have taken 'minor hints' from Grafton and Stow. He does not attempt to locate the source of the chantries reference in particular. He does, though, imply that Shakespeare may have been familiar with Caxton's *Brut* chronicle, where he could have found the information about the chantries. See Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. iv (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1962), 347–75, especially 352–3. In his edition of *Henry V* (London: Methuen, 1954), J. H. Walter cites Robert Fabyan as a source for the chantries passage, an identification that has been repeated by subsequent editors of the play.

¹⁰ William Caxton, *Chronicles of England* (London, 1480), sig. U4v.

¹¹ Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1811), 589.

¹² Stow probably relied on Fabyan for this information. Interestingly, Stow does not mention this detail about the rites for Richard in his description of Henry's reign in his older historical work, *Summarie of Englyshe Chronicles* published in 1565. Judith H. Anderson has made a convincing case that Shakespeare used Stow's 1592 *Annales* later in his career as an important source for *Henry VIII*. See Anderson, *Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), 136–42.

to that paid-for-intercessory action is clear. Shakespeare thus made a point of fetching a detail for Henry's speech that appears most commonly, with the prominent exception of Stow, in sources composed and initially printed before Henry VIII's break with Rome. What is the effect of this deliberate reference to a 'popish' practice on the Elizabethan stage? A brief examination of the chantries and their dissolution might help guide speculation on the matter.

The chantries were dissolved through two acts of parliament, the first in 1545 under Henry VIII, and the second two years later in 1547 with the ascension of Edward VI. Duffy writes that 'The Edwardine Chantries Act justified the dissolutions, not on economic grounds, but on the basis of religious principle.'¹³ A glimpse of this principle can be seen in the preamble to the 1547 Act, which characterizes the chantries' purpose as 'phantasising vain opinions of purgatory and masses satisfactory, to be done for them which be departed'.¹⁴ As this quotation indicates, from the reformer's point of view, intercessory practices such as these were a sign of the perverted and superstitious doctrine of the Roman church, and thus a frequent target of reformer complaint. Connected to the doctrine of purgatory, their elimination was a key element of Protestant efforts to purge the English church of excessive, scripturally unjustified, ritual.¹⁵

Chantries had been an important and well-known feature of the theological cosmos of English Christianity. One historian, comparing the relative effect of dissolving the chantries with another mandated institutional dissolution, writes that the chantries 'bore a far closer relation to the daily life of the people than did the majority of the monasteries'.¹⁶ It is clear that chantries represented a familiar practice with deep roots, and with often widespread effects. As historians have noted, in addition to serving intercessory purposes for individuals, chantries could also be dedicated to organizing more community-oriented forms of worship, and often catalyzed parish educational efforts.¹⁷ The abrogation of the chantries in 1547 could not have fully erased some notion of their existence from the minds of Shakespeare's theatergoers just two generations removed.

¹³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 455.

¹⁴ Quoted *ibid.* 454.

¹⁵ In *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 99–100, Philip Schwyzer briefly discusses the chantries and the 'undeniably traumatic impact on religious and communal life' their dissolution had.

¹⁶ A. G. Dickens, from *The English Reformation*, quoted in Kreider, *English Chantries*, 2.

¹⁷ On education and other 'practical' contributions of the chantries, see Kreider, *English Chantries*, 38–70, especially 59–64.

Henry's mention of chantries and intercessory practices in a late-Elizabethan play may have induced nostalgia for a world of such rituals, or may have worked to remind audiences of an unsavory practice now safely in the past. Such ambiguity fits nicely into the age-old debate over how positively or negatively audiences are meant to perceive Henry himself. The even more complicated question of whether Shakespeare personally was sympathetic to the Catholic doctrine invoked here is beyond the scope of my interests. I want to make a very simple point: Shakespeare represents Henry referring to practices that place him in a time period clearly distinct from the 1590s London stage, a temporally distant, *past* era.

In exhibiting self-consciousness about historical difference, *Henry V* acknowledges the awesome rupture of the Reformation, a break from the past which served as a prompt to initiate critical historical inquiry throughout the sixteenth century. As one member of the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries remarked 'when the popes aucthority was abolished out of England by King Henry the eight . . . there was spetiall care had of the search for Antient books and Antiquities for manifestation unto the world of theise usurpations of the pope.'¹⁸ Faith and worship were now framed by a sense of the Church as a temporal, historical institution. The notion of change—here, of the Catholic Church's break from the mission of the original, 'true' Church—became fundamental to how the past was conceived, and the task of the historian began to be the work of tracing and anatomizing such ruptures.

Henry's historicizing gesture is most interesting in that it not only differentiates eras, but specifically historicizes a form of memory making, memory making that can be seen as doing historical work. The purely spiritual dimension of the chantry efforts cannot be denied. It is clear that testators who left sums to have masses held and prayers said in their honor did so in hopes that it would hasten their ascent to heaven. But they also had a worldly dimension and function. For one thing, such bequests were a form of 'conspicuous consumption' that witnessed the testators' wealth as well as their piety.¹⁹ It was, in other words, a means of securing one's legacy and ensuring one's name would be kept in circulation in the temporal world. Ideally, it served to connect the past to the present. Stephen Greenblatt, for instance, has written of

¹⁸ Quoted in W. H. Herendeen, 'William Camden: Historian, Herald, and Antiquary', *Studies in Philology* 85:2 (1988), 192–210, esp. 205.

¹⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 328.

such intercessory practices as 'linking the living with the souls of countless previous generations'.²⁰ Although in one sense this was a metaphysical connection between past and present, one with the potential to suggest an atemporal Christian community, it also helped maintain a sense of the movement of time: those alive in the present pray for those who once lived but are no longer here.

The practice of bequeathing money to have masses and prayers said and songs sung straddles the line between personal and collective memory. When individuals leave money for the benefit of their own souls, and perhaps a narrow circle of the souls of their families and friends, the practice veers toward the private.²¹ But the fact that chantries could serve as community centers for education and other spiritual purposes gives them a more public, communal function. In Henry's case, he has secured the efforts of intercessors on another's behalf, and that other, a former monarch, is a very public, national figure. It is in this way that Henry's words in this speech align the practice with a kind of collective memory making that amounts to historical work. While the practice as he describes it does not involve a written testament about Richard's life or death, he has initiated a communal and long-term means—'500 poor' engaged 'yearly' and 'two chantries', where the priests sing 'still'—of ensuring Richard will not be forgotten.

Henry proclaims to the French Princess at the play's end that 'we are the makers of manners' (5.2.270–1). Culture, in Henry's mind, is regulated from the top down. Henry has ordered that a large number of people 'twice a day' publicly crave 'pardon' for his father's usurpation of the throne, thus suggesting a complicated official reading of the processes by which he became king, what one critic has called Henry's acceptance of a 'martyr myth' about Richard.²² In his efforts to come to terms with the legacy of his inheritance, Henry engages in a mode of penance for his father's crime against Richard that is also a means of promulgating history. And from the perspective of the present of the play's

²⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001), 16. Greenblatt briefly discusses Henry's words quoted above on p. 21, and in his endnotes, at 268 nn. 27 and 28.

²¹ In *Stripping of the Altars* Duffy does note, though, that many testators did include language in their wills to indicate that the prayers said for them should also include some reference to 'all Christian souls'. See, for instance, the discussion of John Estbury, cited earlier.

²² Sanford Sternlicht, 'The Making of a Political Martyr-Myth: Shakespeare's Use of the Memory of Richard II in *1 & 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*', in *Ball State Univ. Forum* 12:2 (Spring 1971), 26–38, especially 37–8 on *Henry V*.

performance, this means of promulgating history—intercessory church ritual—is obsolete.

This speech designates the era of Henry as *pre-Reformation*. Of course, this was a messier temporal split in the sixteenth century than such a modernly formulated tag implies. Yet, Shakespeare's audience would be conscious of, in a broad sense, a pre-Reformation era marked by religious practices no longer in use. Indeed, by the 1590s, such practices had become symbols of what the Reformation changed. Sermons, political and theological tracts, plays, poems, ballads, and other works—not least of which being the regularly re-printed and widely available *Acts and Monuments* of John Foxe—from the mid-sixteenth century on relentlessly reminded the faithful of the Catholic rituals that had been expunged from the English Church. Shakespeare's *Henry V* participates in this trend by highlighting outdated religious practices to differentiate King Henry's time from its own time. And, by citing a defunct mode of relating to the past, the play represents variation in commemorative practices as an indicator of historical change.

Chronicle: 'Those That Have not Read the Story . . . and of Such as Have'

Henry V opens with a prologue that asserts authorial and theatrical control over the larger telling of history the play offers. The play's ensuing initial scenes represent history in the more particular hands of the Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as Henry's preferred historian; the King, in his first line, asks for the Archbishop, and when Canterbury enters, Henry immediately asks him to hold forth: 'My learned lord, we pray you to proceed, | And justly and religiously unfold | Why the law Salique that they have in France, | Or should or should not, bar us in our claim' (1.2.9–12). In Henry's formulation, the history he expects from Canterbury will be 'just' and religious. The implied, official expectation is that history is most properly controlled by the Church, for there it can be preserved and told free of corruption.

Canterbury delivers what is arguably the most ancient form of historical discourse: a genealogy. While Canterbury's speech is more comically obscure and sinisterly conspiratorial than it is sincerely informative or persuasive, the key point for the play is that Henry employs it as the basis of his subsequent foreign

adventure. The Archbishop's speech indeed becomes reified as a *written* genealogy that Henry sends the French court as evidence of his title to the throne of France (2.4.88–95). The Church does not hold exclusive rights to history in the play. Henry himself makes his own study of the past evident, saying 'You shall read that my great-grandfather | Never went with his forces into France | But that the Scot' subsequently invaded England (1.2.146–8). Nonetheless, it is striking to note that the play represents its key historical knowledge as emanating initially from Churchmen: the oral declamation of the Salic law to the English court that takes the material form of a genealogy sent to the French. From Gildas, Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, through the chaplains of Henry V's court thought to have produced the first biographies of his reign, there is a long native tradition in early Britain and England of monks and priests serving as historians. Shakespeare chooses to begin his play locating historical knowledge within this ancient tradition.²³

Henry and his court learn the intricacies of the Salic law that, they believe, justifies the invasion of France. But for Williams and the common soldiers for whom he speaks, the justness of Henry's cause is 'more than we know' (4.1.129). Henry in fact emphasizes the King's exclusive knowledge of *arcana imperium* when he envies the common man's contrasting 'vacant mind' and the fact that his 'gross brain little wots | What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace' (4.1.269, 282–3). Historical knowledge circulates outside the Church in *Henry V*, but it remains confined to royalty, high aristocracy, and military leaders.

In terms of the dissemination of the historical, *Henry V* makes evident that historical knowledge by the time of the play's performance has moved beyond the confines of the Church and the high aristocracy. Toward the end of *Henry V*, the Chorus invokes the sixteenth century's dominant form of historiography:

CHOR	Vouchsafe to those that have not read the story, That I may prompt them; and of such as have, I humbly pray them to admit th' excuse Of time, of numbers, and due course of things, Which cannot in their huge and proper life Be here presented.	(5.Prologue.1–6)
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²³ See C. L. Kingsford's 'The Early Biographies of Henry V', *English Historical Review* 25:97 (1910), 58–92.

The Chorus refers to history through print; some in the audience will have 'read the story'. When Caxton published his continuation of the *Brut* chronicle in 1480, he created a sea change in the dissemination of history to the English reading public by initiating the print publication of chronicles. D. R. Woolf writes that 'throughout the Middle Ages the limitations on reproduction imposed by a chirographic technology had restricted the medieval chronicle... to a comparatively small audience.'²⁴ By contrast, the printing press helped make works on history in the form of the chronicle 'more widely accessible', reaching even the 'lower levels of the literate'.²⁵ Attempts to accommodate an increasingly wide audience for history can be seen in the issuing of smaller redactions of the chronicles, such as Grafton's 'Abridgments' of 1562 and 1576, and Stow's several 'Summaries' starting in 1565. Such smaller books were both cheaper and, in the words of Thomas Heywood's preface to a compressed historical work of his own, 'more portable... to beare in the pocket, so that thou mayst say, that in this small compendium or abstract, thou has Holinshed, Polychronicon, Fabian, Speed, or any of the rest, of more Giantlike bulke or binding.'²⁶

The point of the Chorus's remarks here is partially to apologize to those who have read the story for the elisions the play will be making. In other words, the Chorus posits the 'story' as it might be 'read' in the chronicles as potentially public knowledge that the play will fail to corroborate. To be sure, the Chorus's first words are to those who have *not* read the story; it is important not to exaggerate the number of playgoers who would have been expected to be also regular chronicle readers.²⁷ And yet, that enough playgoers could be thought to be readers of these works to warrant a verbal nod to them indicates that the time of the play's performance is different than the time the play depicts. When Henry says, 'You shall read' about the exploits of his 'great-grandfather', he is speaking to Canterbury, Ely, Exeter, and a few other members of the royal family and court. The kind of chronicle the Chorus is referencing when he

²⁴ D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 14.

²⁵ Ibid. 18, 22. Louis B. Wright discusses the 'popularity' of the chronicles in *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1958), 301 and *passim*.

²⁶ Quoted by Louis B. Wright in 'Heywood and the Popularizing of History', *Modern Language Notes* 43:5 (May 1928), 288.

²⁷ See Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 264–76, on how Holinshed was read. See also Woolf, *Reading History*, especially 132–67, for an attempt to assess the readership of early modern print works about history.

speaks of those who have read the story has come into being after the time in which the play is set, and is thus distinct from the kind Fluellen and others in the play claim to read (see, for instance Canterbury at 1.2.163 and Fluellen at 4.7.94). The literate, book-buying playgoers in Shakespeare's audience to whom the Chorus speaks about reading the story represent a 'sort' of consumers of historical knowledge that do not exist in the world of the play, where those who know and speak about national and world history are restricted to a small circle. The play cites a form of historiography, the chronicle, that was not in itself new, but that, by virtue of a novel mechanical mode of production and consequent faster, cheaper, and wider distribution, had an essentially different cultural impact than its pre-printing press ancestor.

Before the play's climactic battle, Henry speaks in rousing terms of Agincourt as an event that in the future will be remembered and discussed between 'neighbors' and passed on through generations: Henry promises that 'this story shall the good man teach his son' (4.3.45, 56), suggesting a potentially more democratic notion of historical dissemination. Henry's statement that those who accompany him into battle can become speakers of history is still a select privilege of surviving the day. It is after all only those 'happy few' who will return to England to perpetuate the battle as oral legend ('Remember with *advantages*') rather than as history in mass circulation (4.3.60, 50, emphases added). The play suggests a past in which historical knowledge circulated within a Church–Aristocracy–Military loop. This representation does not tally with the realities of fifteenth-century historical culture. There is evidence, for instance, that members of London's merchant milieu took an interest in reading pre-print era histories.²⁸ But according to the logic of *Henry V*, print chronicles had by the late sixteenth century eclipsed the elite forms of written and spoken history we see represented as dominant in the era in which the play is set.

The play's most outspoken proponent of historical knowledge is the Welsh captain Fluellen, who continually cites classical precedent. It is in his praise of "Fortune" as "an excellent moral" that Fluellen makes evident his habits

²⁸ On this point, see C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 70–112, esp. 78, where Kingsford remarks that the high rate of production of copies of the fifteenth-century London Chronicles 'is sufficient proof that the Chronicles were in great request'. On the prevalence and public nature of these works, see also Mary-Rose McLaren's *The London Chronicles of the Fifteenth Century: A Revolution in Historical Writing* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 3–13 and 140–6.

of thought (3.6.38). Historical knowledge for him is part of the same fabric of wisdom and universal truth as the figure of Fortune. Historical truths are exemplary, and should be drawn upon, following the Ciceronian tradition, at key moments to guide present behavior. The prescriptive potential of history is always more important than the details of historical events or persons it encodes, for the past is most importantly *figural*: as Fluellen says, “there is figures in all things” (4.7.34). Thus, the ancient Alexander the Great announces the Henry of the present, for both, according to Fluellen’s eccentric reasoning, are warrior-kings who come from regions that have rivers stocked with salmon.

Henry himself, albeit affectionately, points out that Fluellen’s historical sensibility is quaint. Hearing him invoke Pompey’s camp as a model for the English, Henry remarks ‘Though it appear a little out of fashion, | There is much care and valor in this Welshman’ (4.1.83–4). Henry gives credit to Fluellen’s loyalty, but this does not erase his charge that the Captain is out of date. More importantly, though, Fluellen’s own words give audiences and readers ample opportunity to find his historical method faulty and inadequate. David Quint, in an important article on *Henry V*’s relation to debates within humanist circles about the production and uses of history, has shown in particular Fluellen’s inability to make his own Alexander comparison coherent.²⁹ Fluellen elsewhere shows a capacity to exercise poor judgment in making sense of the present through historical analogy when he describes the rascal Pistol, who the Welshman himself will later have cause to cudgel, ‘as valiant a man as Mark Antony’ because of his superficial use of ‘prave words’ (3.6.13–14, 63).

Chroniclers like Holinshed and Hall do invoke the prescriptive value of history to justify their enterprises. Yet, in the preface to Holinshed’s 1577 *Chronicles*, while the author claims to represent truth, he deliberately cedes ultimate interpretive power to the reader, preferring to ‘shew the diversitie of their [his sources] writings, than by over-ruling them, and using a premtorie censure, to frame them to agree to my liking: leaving it neverthesse to each mans judgement, to controll them as he seeth cause.’³⁰ This is a move to shift interpretive

²⁹ See Quint, “‘Alexander the Pig’: Shakespeare on History and Poetry”, 49–67.

³⁰ Raphael Holinshed, ‘Preface to the Reader’, from the 1577 edition to Holinshed’s *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, reprinted along with the 1587 edition of the *Chronicles*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (New York: AMS Reprint, 1965), 361. See also F. J. Levy’s and Annabel Patterson’s disparate readings of this statement: Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1967), 184; Patterson, ‘Rethinking Tudor Historiography’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92:2 (1993), 190.

responsibility from pedantic interlocutors to readers. Moreover, the mode of comprehension exhibited in Fluellen's precept-driven method was harder to achieve in the massive chronicle works that strived for accumulation of information as much as anything else. Despite the best efforts of a writer like Hall, who explicitly sought to impose a larger moral pattern onto his history of the Wars of the Roses, John Donne could still refer to him, along with Holinshed and Stow, as responsible for the production of 'trivial household trash'.³¹ The quotidian events of history became for the chronicler significant and interesting in and of themselves. The *copia* of the chronicles, through sheer density of detail, allowed for a moral uncertainty about the events depicted. This potential for the meaning of any event to be obscured within the 'Giantlike bulke or binding' of a chronicle was a primary source of disgust with the form by humanist-educated writers like Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey.

When William Camden in the preface to *Britannia* writes, 'I have in no wise neglected such things as are most materiall to search and sift out the Truth' he is speaking of *factual* rather than moral truth, and thus indicates a growing imperative among historians to get the story right whether or not that story lends itself to educative purposes.³² As a 'culture of fact' emerged in the epistemologies of both legal and historical work, records and documents attained more authority as the evidentiary basis of knowledge about past, a development Shakespeare acknowledges through his use of and reference to histories playgoers may have 'read'.³³ Hence, the Chorus's need to apologize to 'such as have' read about Henry V for disappointing expectations of delivering the full narrative in favor of dramatic compression.

The play depicts the era of Henry V as a time when historical knowledge originates within the Church and is passed outward to the royal court and to military leaders, without going much farther than this selective group. In *Henry V*

³¹ John Donne, *Satire 4*, line 98, quoted from *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (New York: Penguin, 1971).

³² Camden's epistle 'from the author to the reader', quoted from Philemon Holland's translation of *Brittania: Britain, or, a Chorographall Description of the most flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London, 1610), sig. 4. The *epistola* to the 1586 first edition contains virtually the same sentiment in Latin.

³³ The phrase is the title of Barbara Shapiro's book *A Culture of Fact: England, 1550–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000). Shapiro discusses legal and historical facts in her first two chapters, 8–62. See 12, 15–16, 38, 42–3, and *passim* on the growing authority of documents in determining the truth about the past.

Shakespeare suggests this aspect of English historical culture to be antiquated in the Elizabethan era, due to the growth of the printed chronicle tradition to which the Chorus refers. In Fluellen, we see an interest in the past focused on exempla, precepts, and incredible analogies, and concerned with didacticism and utility. Of course, Fluellen's utilitarian notion of history has never really been displaced. And, indeed, it was in favor, at least in more competent form, among late-Elizabethan humanists. Nonetheless it is an approach to the past put under stress by the chronicle tradition, and clearly being parodied here as old fashioned, conveying again the impression that innovations in how the past is told occur, and thus that older forms of history can be superseded.

Cockpit: The Knowledge of Falstaff

Early in the play, the Archbishop of Canterbury makes reference to a battle almost as famous as Agincourt, the English victory over the French at Crécy in 1346. Canterbury tells of Henry's famous ancestor and his deeds there:

CANT	Edward the Black Prince, Who on the French ground play'd a tragedy, Making defeat on the full power of France, Whiles his most mighty father on a hill Stood smiling to behold his lion's whelp Forage in blood of French nobility.	(1.2.105–10)
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The French king later echoes Canterbury's lines about this particular battle between England and France (2.4.53–9), and Fluellen mentions it indirectly (4.7.91–3).

The persistence of the Crécy reference owes something to the London stages. The anonymously-authored *Edward III*, believed by some scholars to be a Shakespearean composition, was listed in the Stationer's Register in 1595, and published in 1596, but is possibly an even older work. *Edward III* contains a scene in which King Edward removes to a hill to watch whether his son, the Black Prince, can fight his way out of a battle against enormous odds. Canterbury and the French king in *Henry V* refer to this episode in specific detail. However, this incident does not appear in that precise form in the chronicle sources. In other words, the knowledge of Crécy articulated in *Henry V* would seem to derive from the popular stage play that, according to

its title page, was 'sundrie times plaied about the Citie of London'.³⁴ There can be little doubt that many members of the audience of *Henry V* would be familiar with *Edward III*, and would recognize these references to the Black Prince's heroics through their memories of that earlier play. Through Canterbury and the French king's reminiscences, *Henry V* thus calls attention to another new form in which the past can be represented, a form available to Elizabethan Londoners on an almost daily basis: theatrical performance.

Henry V is Shakespeare's most metatheatrical history play; perhaps it is his most metatheatrical play of any kind. While exploration and complication of the ancient *theatrum mundi* trope is pervasive in the Shakespeare canon, nowhere else does he so explicitly and lengthily comment on the palpable theater in which the specific play at hand is being performed. The Chorus's repeated references to the stage, props, actors, and other specific conventions of representation, including the admission that battle scenes proceed through 'four or five most vile and ragged foils, | (Right ill dispos'd, in brawl ridiculous),' (4.Prologue.50–1) are extreme examples of what Roland Barthes, drawing on linguistic theory, calls 'shifters' in the historical utterance, verbal formulae whereby the producing agent of history is revealed through the act of promulgating it.³⁵ The Chorus's shifters are almost exclusively apologetic. Yet, despite these effusive apologies for inadequacy, the play itself affirms the theater as a vehicle of historical transmission.

One of the main effects of the Chorus's theatrically self-conscious rhetoric is that it makes clear that the play is happening in a present moment the players and the audience share. In other words, the Chorus keeps the 'liveness' of theater, what distinguishes it from other forms of historical representation, at the forefront of audience experience of the play. Performance in the professional theater is still by the 1590s a relatively recent form of representing history, an addition to the chronicles and other print materials that disseminated the past throughout the late fifteenth and entire sixteenth centuries. The history play did not emerge *ex nihilo* in the Elizabethan era. The genre has roots in the medieval mysteries, for instance. But the kind of national

³⁴ E. Pearlman discusses this and another instance in the play where historical knowledge seems to derive solely from details from *Edward III*—Canterbury's description of the capture of the Scottish King David—in an insightful article 'Edward III in *Henry V*', *Criticism* 37:4 (1995), 519–36. The 1596 title page advertisement is quoted in Pearlman, 519.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook* 3 (1981), 7–20.

histories put on in the late sixteenth century, before a heterogeneous, paying audience in largely secular, urban, diurnal, permanent, purpose-built theaters, was, by virtue of this new context, undeniably a new form of presenting the past. The Chorus highlights professional theater itself as a recent innovation when it calls attention to the 'playhouse' where the playgoers 'sit', a reference to the physical structures that only came to dot the London landscape in the later sixteenth century (2.Prologue.36).

It is in this new, specially circumscribed space that the audience's 'thoughts... now must deck our kings,' thoughts produced in the 'quick forge and working-house' of the mind (Prologue.28; 5.Prologue.23). One specific mental activity that *Henry V* calls upon its audiences to perform is to remember Sir John Falstaff. Knowledge of Falstaff is not 'historical' in the sense that he is not, as represented in this play, a persona from the documented English past. Yet knowledge of him is knowledge of explorations of the English past on stage in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, not to mention *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He is linked closely enough to Hal/Henry V over the course of these plays that awareness of this figure amounts to knowledge of Henry and the events of his and his father's reign. While the presence of Falstaff in some sense de-historicizes the plays, and thus cuts against the emphasis on truth I have cited as an emerging part of the chronicle tradition to which the voice of the Chorus is sensitive, this character does stand for an aspect of historical representation that contributes to the complication of the exemplary theory of history: the pleasure of history. As a source of distinctly *theatrical* pleasure in the plays—he was almost certainly played by the company's famous clown, Will Kemp—Falstaff helps to create and meet a desire to experience history for different reasons than to learn lessons. And knowledge of him, and why he merits mention in *Henry V*, is crucial to audience experience of some scenes in the play.

In the first such scene, as the setting shifts from the English court to a tavern, the Boy interrupts a conflict between two of Falstaff's lackeys from the *Henry IV* plays, Nim and Pistol, saying 'Mine host Pistol, you must come to my master, and your hostess. He is very sick, and would to bed' (2.1.81–2). The Hostess exits with the Boy, noting of Falstaff: 'by my troth, he'll yield the crow a pudding one of these days. The King has kill'd his heart' (2.1.87–8). The last line is a reference that would be cryptic if audiences were not aware of the King's rejection of Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*. A scene later, Falstaff's death is reported in the best historiographical traditions by an eyewitness, the Hostess:

HOST He's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away and it had been any christom child. 'A parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o'th' tide . . . So 'a cried out 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God; I hop'd there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so up'ard and up'ard, and all was as cold as any stone. (2.2.9–26)

The Hostess provides not only information such as the approximate time of 'Sir John's' death and his final words, but adds the tactile description of what his dying and soon dead body *felt* like. This scene, and the many recollections of Falstaff's wit it includes, can make sense in its own right, but the overall level of detail in it would be odd unless it is in reference to a character with whom audiences have some previous memory and some investment of interest. Shakespeare, in other words, could confidently engage in some dramatic shorthand to communicate information and make a few jokes in this scene: the 'yield a crow a pudding line' certainly depends here on awareness of Falstaff's infamous girth for its particular power as a dark jest. The original audiences for *Henry V* could rely on their theatrical knowledge to discern these elements of the play. The scenes about Falstaff's death exhibit a reasonable assurance that audiences have seen and retained information from history plays.

Of course, any discussion of Falstaff is complicated by the controversy over his name itself. In one sense, the figure of Sir John Falstaff has no existence beyond the realm of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and, perhaps, an ambiguously related figure in *1 Henry VI*. As is well known, though, the character Sir John Falstaff was in *1 Henry IV* originally called Sir John 'Oldcastle'. Even though the name was probably altered to Falstaff by the time *2 Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives*, and *Henry V* were written and performed, there is evidence from the period to suggest that audiences well into the seventeenth century still associated the character with the name Oldcastle, and that perhaps *1 Henry IV* was still being performed with the character so named.³⁶

³⁶ For an overview of the Oldcastle controversy, see Gary Taylor, 'The Fortunes of Oldcastle', *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985), 85–110. See also xv–xviii of A. R. Humphreys's Arden edition of *1 Henry IV* (London: Routledge, 1960).

The controversy itself deals with the fact that Sir John Oldcastle was a historical figure, especially revered in Protestant historiography as a great hero-martyr who would not merit the apparent slander of his characterization as a fat, gluttonous, thieving knight in Shakespeare's plays. There is not space here to rehearse this knotty issue and its political and editorial implications.³⁷ But if it is true that audiences had a long-term association of Falstaff with Oldcastle, a figure with an existence independent of the playhouse, it would alter the dynamics of my claim here that knowledge of Falstaff as a figure linked with Henry V signals access to the past through theater. It is worth considering, then, Shakespeare's own explicit commentary on the matter in the Epilogue to *2 Henry IV*:

If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France, where (for any thing I know) Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already 'a be kill'd with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died [a] martyr, and this is not the man. (Epilogue.26–32)

The fact that Shakespeare could include reference to the Oldcastle controversy in the epilogue to *2 Henry IV* indicates how well known the theatrical figure of his fat knight had become to audiences. Establishing Falstaff as distinct from Oldcastle is the goal of the epilogue, which is further advanced in *Henry V* through the specific details of how he dies: in his bed attended by the Hostess, not as a martyr gruesomely killed in a manner described and also depicted in a woodcut in Foxe's widely disseminated *Acts and Monuments*. Shakespeare explicitly separates Falstaff from Oldcastle in preparation for his *Henry V* play, asserting that Falstaff is a character born within the sphere of the theater: 'this is not the man.'

Falstaff does not appear in *Henry V*, probably for reasons that have to do with the theater business: Will Kemp's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's Men.³⁸ Falstaff's character resonates instead as a memory (albeit one that is slipping from the mind of Fluellen (4.7.50)). Falstaff's memory is still vivid for

³⁷ For two responses to Taylor's essay, each with their own reasons for disputing his call for editors to restore the name Oldcastle to printed texts of *1 Henry IV*, see David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 93–106, and Jonathan Goldberg, *Shakespeare's Hand* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 212–21.

³⁸ On the various possibilities for this scenario, see James Shapiro *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 36–9.

the Hostess, Nym, Pistol, Bardolph, the Boy, and presumably audiences as well. Such 'low' characters, as Phyllis Rackin and Richard Helgerson have asserted, perhaps even foreground the theatrical form of the history plays further by associating characters closely with the 'common' players who enact them.³⁹ Pistol, for instance, is, in the Folio text, twice called a 'counterfeit', a word often used in anti-theatrical literature of the period to describe actors (3.6.61 and 5.1.69). Rackin further notes that Pistol, whose name itself is an anachronism, speaks in a language 'stitched together from scraps of plays that were not written until the sixteenth century for a theater that did not even exist' in the time Pistol is supposed to be living.⁴⁰ Such anachronism, rather than blurring the 'planes of historicity' the play achieves elsewhere, affirms the difference of time periods by highlighting the time of the play's performance as distinct from the time it enacts.

Shakespeare's gesture toward his own theater work, and toward his audience's awareness of that work in terms of history, occurs again in the epilogue to *Henry V*, in which he employs the most explicit historical 'shifter' of the play: 'Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen | Our bending author hath pursu'd the story' (Epilogue.1–2). By the end of the Epilogue, he expands this self-reference to remind audiences of other history plays he has written, the *Henry VI* plays, that many of them would have had the opportunity to have seen: 'Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crown'd King | Of France and England, did this king [Henry V] succeed, | Whose state so many had the managing | That they lost France, and made his England bleed, | Which oft our stage hath shown' (9–13). In a famous moment in Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, Fitzdottrel claims his historical know-how derives from seeing stage plays. If awareness of history through drama was axiomatic by 1616, the year Shakespeare died and *The Devil is an Ass* premiered, the possibility of such dramatic-historical awareness was being constructed by Shakespeare almost twenty years earlier in *Henry V*.

³⁹ Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 193–245, and Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 201–48.

⁴⁰ Rackin, *Stages of History*, 139. See also Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 139–44.

Conclusion: Shakespeare's Past

Mark Salber Phillips has written that 'elementary dimensions of historical representation' can be understood as producing 'distance effects'.⁴¹ The 'elementary dimensions' that create distance effects in *Henry V* mark historical change through emphasizing differences in how successive ages produce and circulate historical knowledge. Such dimensions here include showing Henry engaged in outdated historical forms, such as using the chantries to memorialize Richard; and to be contemporary with the circulation of history in a form that is narrowly distributed and reductively didactic, in contrast to a form that is widely circulated and plentiful complex, that is, the Chronicles with which the Chorus assumes playgoers of the 1590s might be familiar. The commentary of the Chorus about the act of performing history, coupled with an emphasis in the play on the memory of Falstaff, a creature of the theater, subsumes the whole representation of the past the play delivers in the practice of the professional theater, a novel enterprise of the late sixteenth century.

None of what I have argued here is to deny the ways that historical work is always a site of current contestation, wherein issues from the past are adduced or actively suppressed to achieve contemporary ends. The Oldcastle affair alone attests to this, as does the putative reference to Essex's Irish campaign in the Chorus's lines that preface Act 5. Such things inevitably demonstrate how present-oriented the past always is in historical representation. Yet, my aim here has been to point out those ways that, within that present-centered framework, the form and language of *Henry V* work to assert *discontinuity* between time periods. It would, of course, be wrong to say that Shakespeare in his histories of the fifteenth-century English monarchy 'invented' some notion of the English Middle Ages, the way Petrarch and other Italian humanists can be said to have invented the 'Dark Ages' between classical antiquity and the *quattrocento*.⁴² But in *Henry V* Shakespeare does differentiate what we now call the medieval era from his own era through noting developments and innovations in how the present processes and broadcasts the past, a differentiation made most vivid throughout the play in references to the new form with which he worked to make history: commercial performance.

⁴¹ Mark Salber Phillips, 'Distance and Historical Representation', *History Workshop Journal* 51:1 (Spring 2004), 123–41, 126.

⁴² See Theodore E. Mommsen, 'Petrarch's Conception of the "Dark Ages"', *Speculum* 17 (1942), 226–42.

‘For They Are Englishmen’

National Identities and the Early Modern Drama of Medieval Conquest

Curtis Perry

Though most scholars agree that fully fledged nationalism is a modern phenomenon, it is often seen to have important roots in sixteenth-century England.¹ Liah Greenfeld, in her well-known comparative study of the emergence of modern nationalist sentiment, finds its first intimation in the England of Henry VIII, and several influential recent studies have discussed the role played by literature in a distinctively early modern cultural program that Richard Helgerson has named ‘the Elizabethan writing of England’.² There

¹ Studies of nationalism as a modern phenomenon include Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; rev. edn, London: Verso, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983); and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).

² Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992). In addition to Richard Helgerson’s *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), see the following: David J. Baker, *Between Nations: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marvell, and the Question of Britain* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997); Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004); Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics, and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997); Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996); Willy Maley, *Nation, State*

have been a number of interesting recent discussions of nationalisms in medieval England, too, and these have vigorously challenged the idea that the nation is an exclusively modern phenomenon.³ But even if one can find striking examples of nation-conjuring in medieval documents, surely the extent of the early modern fascination with the 'imagined community' of England, to borrow Benedict Anderson's ubiquitous phrase, is unprecedented.⁴

This incipient or enhanced sense of nationhood is one of the ways in which critics are likely to think of the modernity of the early modern period, as part of a larger narrative about the centralization and consolidation of England under the Tudors. And yet the texts that construct early modern ideas of nation inevitably locate them in relation to the authority of a reconstructed medieval past, and do so by means of a conservative disposition toward history that ensures the complete saturation of early modern culture with medievalism. In order to understand early modern England's national self-fashioning, we need to rethink the relationship between emergent forms of nationalism and the nature of the Elizabethan and early Stuart medievalism upon which they are always grounded. For, as Anderson has suggested, what we think of as nationalism necessarily involves a distinctively modern attitude toward history and time, one in which the imagined community of the nation is held together by a sense of the simultaneity of all its constituent individuals so that (like an individual) it can be conceptualized as a single entity existing in the present and explained by a narrative biography of its past.⁵

and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Jodi Mikalachki, *The Legacy of Boadicea: Gender and Nation in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1998); Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004). See also Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

³ See especially the following: Kathleen Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998), 611–37; Kathy Lavezzo (ed.), *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2004); Janet Thormann, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Poems and the Making of the English Nation', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1997), 60–85; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁵ *Ibid.* 22–36, 204–6. See also Étienne Balibar, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', trans. Chris Turner, in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 86–106. Balibar writes, 'The history of nations . . . is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject' (86).

Obsession with the medieval past is part and parcel of early modern England's proto-nationalist impulse toward self-definition, but it is important to remember how extraordinarily varied and heterogeneous early modern England's historical culture was.⁶ National history, for an early modern English subject, was transmitted in innumerable, inconsistent, and often surprising ways in chronicles, narrative histories, antiquarian reconstructions, oral traditions, communal rituals, plays, ballads, broadsides, polemics, and literary fictions with varying pretensions to accuracy. There were also multiple ways of understanding the relevance of the past to the present. Part of what makes an Elizabethan tome like Holinshed's *Chronicles* seem undisciplined to modern historians is its inclusive, accumulative attitude toward historical data. F. J. Levy, some time ago, remarked that the Tudor chronicler 'did not remake the past in his own image or in any other but instead reported the events of the past in the order in which they occurred.'⁷ There is of course no such thing as unmediated historical narration, and Annabel Patterson has shown that the Holinshed authors had their own agendas.⁸ But Levy's exasperation underscores the difference between a modern sense of historical narrative and the comparatively loose organization of the Tudor chronicle. This difference is important because any truly nationalist history needs to be remade in the image of the nation as a coherent entity in the present. A history lacking a consistent sense of anachronism, in which any episode in the undifferentiated past can relate to the present as an exemplar or precedent, lacks the unifying principles of selection and biographical narrative required by the nationalist sense of history Anderson describes.

In this light, it is easy to see why Shakespeare's two tetralogies have been so central to attempts to trace the foundations of nationalism in early modern England. For though these plays stage certain kinds of cultural heterogeneity (in terms of gender and class, in terms of the archipelagic diversity of Britain, and in terms of England's relationship with France), Helgerson is clearly correct to argue that they are ultimately plays about the consolidation of royal power conceived of as central to a brand of national identity.⁹ Each tetralogy drives toward closure conceived

⁶ I borrow the phrase 'historical culture' from Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). See especially 8–16.

⁷ F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1967), 168.

⁸ Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹ Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 195–245. On the way Shakespearean histories deal with these kinds of heterogeneity see Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*; Maley, *Nation, State and Empire*, 7–61; Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989); and Deanne Williams, *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 181–226.

of in terms of royal achievement—the triumph of Henry V and the so-called Tudor myth—even if the plays themselves may sometimes seem to undercut or critique happily settled endings. And since literary critics tend habitually to see Shakespeare's histories as the culmination and epitome of early modern historical representation, they underpin a compelling narrative of national self-fashioning as the imposition of order upon history. Thus, for Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Shakespeare's histories are key proof-texts for a 'process of national consolidation and national self-definition' in which 'the vogue for national history and the national history play . . . appears as an important component of the cultural project of imagining an English nation.'¹⁰

Since narratives concerning the early modern invention of nationalism are deeply entangled with the story of Tudor centralization, they require a brand of Englishness, like Shakespeare's, organized around the monarchy. And yet one of Helgerson's most important arguments is that Shakespeare's histories achieve this consolidated, royalist sense of the nation only by systematically excluding alternative perspectives contained in other history plays.¹¹ This means that we do a disservice to the complexity and multiplicity of early modern constructions of England if we allow Shakespeare's histories to stand for late Elizabethan and early Stuart historical culture in general. 'What interests', Helgerson asks, 'are we preferring when we prefer Shakespeare' to other, alternative dramatizations of medieval history? Part of the answer, I think, is that we are attracted to what is familiar in Shakespeare, to a vision of consolidated monarchical nationhood that resonates with our own modern ideas of nation and state. And yet it is certainly more accurate to think of Shakespeare's histories as one construction of the national past articulated from within a historical culture that contains multiple, conflicting resources for national self-description and which lacks any overriding systematic approach with which to organize its unprecedented abundance of historical information.

This essay attempts to decenter our sense of the nationalist project of the history play by recovering an alternative version of what England meant from a set of less-familiar plays dealing with the Danish and Norman conquests of England in the eleventh century. Within a modern idea of national biography,

¹⁰ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 14.

¹¹ Helgerson (*Forms of Nationhood*, 228–45) draws a distinction between Shakespeare's histories and those produced for Philip Henslowe. *Fair Em* is a Henslowe-sponsored play and *Edmond Ironside* may have been one too.

in which temporal proximity correlates to cultural relevance, such ancient stories would appear to be less immediately important to early modern England than the more recent dynastic history depicted in Shakespeare's two tetralogies. And yet, as D. R. Woolf has suggested, ancient conflicts with the Normans, Romans, and Danes may actually have had a 'higher profile in popular consciousness' than the Wars of the Roses, and it is the Danish invasions that 'recur most often as a topic in popular discourse'.¹² This suggests an accumulative relation to the past that is at once unsystematic and unruly, an attitude toward history more conducive to the production of endless alternative narratives than to the consolidation of any nationalized version of the past.¹³ Woolf's account makes it clear, moreover, that these ancient stories of invasion and resistance could have considerable importance as sources of local identification and pride in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, providing narratives concerning the native us and the foreign them that were also a resource for proto-nationalist sentiment.

Cultural memories of the Danish and Norman conquests do not feature prominently in recent studies of early modern nationalism. It is easy to see why: they emphasize the vulnerability of England, its susceptibility to conquest, its complicated relations with other nearby peoples—everything seemingly denied by Gaunt's famous speech about England's insularity in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Indeed, it is a central tenant of Philip Schwyzer's interesting study of British national memory that the style of Tudor nationalism exemplified by Gaunt's eulogy is forged by excluding Anglo-Saxon history, with its Danish and Norman conquests, and thus by creating a link with imagined British origins.¹⁴ This erasure, he argues, enables an essentially Protestant, royalist brand of Tudor nationalism. My argument here is simply that, within

¹² Woolf, *Social Circulation*, 342–5. See also Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 243–8. On stage Saxons see Leah Scragg, 'Saxons versus Danes: The Anonymous *Edmund Ironside*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carol Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 93–106, and Gordon McMullan, 'The Colonisation of Early Britain on the Jacobean Stage', in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 119–40.

¹³ Escobedo (*Nationalism and Historical Loss*) relates the nationalist project of early modern England to the void left by the Reformation and the difficulty of finding any one national story. It would be possible, instead, to see an uncontrollable excess of stories.

¹⁴ Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory*. On Gaunt's speech (which also provides the leaping-off point for McEachern's *Poetics of English Nationhood*) see 4–6.

the multiplicity of Tudor and early Stuart historical culture, there are alternative national memories with alternative histories and politics that coexist with the forms of national memory Schwyzer describes.

In early modern plays depicting eleventh-century invaders—*Fair Em* (c.1590), which depicts William the Conqueror, and *Edmond Ironside* (c.1595) and the *The Love-sick King* (c.1617), which both feature the Danish conqueror King Canute—these popular stories are organized into a form of nationalism that is in many ways the antithesis of that given expression in a play like *Richard II* or *Henry V*: one that locates the essence of Englishness not in its insularity, conquering might, or heroic monarchy, but rather in the hardiness of its ancient liberties, the vitality of its localities, and its ability to resist conquest by absorbing external threats. These plays, in other words, give us access to an early modern brand of national identity forged out of a sense of the medieval past that—unlike Shakespeare’s—is not fundamentally royalist in nature. In fact, with their emphasis upon Saxon liberty, these plays might be thought of as precursors for the seventeenth-century oppositional discourse associating monarchical tyranny with the Norman yoke. For though these plays lack the oppositional charge later associated with this term, they do help forge the discourse of Saxon liberty that underwrites antimonarchical polemic during the revolutionary era. Moreover, though these stories encapsulate an identifiable and coherent set of ideas about Englishness, their implicit idea of national identity is antithetical to the exclusionary logic of modern nationalism, which depends upon ‘the drawing and politicization of us–them boundaries, the exclusion of visible others, the foundation of membership on not being something else.’¹⁵

The Drama of Conquest and Incorporation

We can see how this alternative national idea works by thinking about the sentimental plotting of (to give it its full title) *A Pleasant Comedie of Faire Em, the Miller’s Daughter of Manchester; With the Love of William the Conqueror*, a pseudo-historical comedy produced by Lord Strange’s Men and printed in 1593 and again in 1631. The play

¹⁵ Charles Tilley, *Identities, Boundaries & Social Ties* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 181.

has two comic love plots, and it is in their juxtaposition that we see its author's imaginative reconstruction of an English national identity. One concerns Em, the daughter of a Saxon gentleman named Sir Thomas Goddard, who has been forced to become a humble miller after the Norman Conquest of England:

MILLER Thus must we mask to save our wretched lives,
 Threat'ned by conquest of this hapless isle,
 Whose sad invasions by the Conqueror
 Have made a number such as we subject
 Their gentle necks unto their stubborn yoke
 Of drudging labor and base peasantry.¹⁶

Em is betrothed to Manville, but courted by two Norman lords, Mountney and Valingford, who pursue her for her beauty despite her apparently low birth. Em puts these suitors off by pretending to be deaf and dumb, but Manville, jealous of the attention Em has received and put off by news of her sudden-onset disabilities, pursues a match with a wealthy citizen's daughter instead. The other plot concerns the amorous adventures of William, 'Britain's mighty conqueror' (1.1). He goes in disguise to woo the Danish princess Blanch, whose picture he has seen and been smitten by. Blanch falls in love with William, but he is unimpressed when he sees her in the flesh and falls in love instead with a Swedish princess Mariana, who is being held captive by the Danish king. Mariana, though, is the beloved of the Danish marquis Lubeck, William's confidante and escort, and though Lubeck is willing to give his beloved to his royal friend, Mariana is unwilling to be given. She agrees to fly with William, but arranges to have Blanch, in a mask, take her place.

The comic plotting of the ending brings these two storylines together and clarifies their ideological significance. William, upon discovering his error, renounces women and love altogether, despite the Danish king's willingness to countenance the union of the Danish and English thrones. But when William is called upon to adjudicate the competing claims of the subplot he recognizes Em's virtue and has a change of heart. 'I see that women are not general evils,' he declares, and agrees to marry Blanch (17.223). William's willingness to marry is celebrated as an act of newfound maturity, since making a sound dip-

¹⁶ Standish Henning, ed., *Fair Em: A Critical Edition* (New York: Garland, 1980), 2.5–10. Subsequent quotations from the play refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically by scene and line numbers. In all quotations I have silently modernized i/j and u/v.

lomatic marriage demonstrates the ability to reconcile personal passions and desires to the greater good of the realm. And the incorporation of Denmark into William's kingdom signals the union of England's two eleventh-century conquerors. At the same time, William's recognition of Em's virtue triggers a reconciliation between Saxons and Normans, for when William opines that Em seems nobler than her station, the truth about her parentage comes out. The upshot of this is nothing less than the harmonious union of Anglo-Norman England, with William exclaiming, 'Sir Thomas Goddard, welcome to thy prince' and the erstwhile miller responding, 'longer let not Goddard live a day | Than he in honor loves his sovereign' (17.261, 266–7). This political reconciliation is sealed by the marriage of Em and Valingford, who is 'no mean man in King William's favor' (16.39–40).

Goddard originally had to adopt his disguise because the conquering Normans, in their 'tyranny', sought to eradicate all of Saxon 'Britain's gentry' (2.19–20). By the end of the play, this conflict has been solved in two complementary ways. William himself has been purged of the erratic and headstrong passions conventionally characteristic of the stage tyrant, and the enmity between Normans and Saxons has been replaced by the reciprocal loyalties avowed by Goddard and the Conqueror. But this is not depicted as the acceptance, by the Saxon gentry, of Norman conquest so much as in terms of the triumph of Saxon exemplarity. For the reconciliations that constitute the play's happy ending are all made possible by the force of the fair Em's Saxon virtue. Even William, who is referred to early on as a 'Norman duke' (3.3) is repeatedly referred to as a 'Saxon duke' (12.28; see also 17.9, 24) as the play reaches its comic finale. What begins as a play about the aftermath of the conquest of the Saxons by the Norman William ends as a play about the absorption of William into a tradition of national virtue represented primarily by the Saxon gentry.

Fair Em's emphasis upon Saxon virtue as an antidote to tyranny resonates with early modern English concerns about the relationship between native traditions of law and the Norman Conquest.¹⁷ For within the orthodoxy that

¹⁷ See the following: Glenn Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution: An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603–1642* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1992), especially 82–6; Janelle Greenberg, *The Radical Face of the Ancient Constitution: St. Edward's 'Laws' in Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (1957; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); J. P. Sommerville, *Politics & Ideology in England, 1603–1640* (London: Longman, 1986), 66–9.

J. G. A. Pocock has famously called 'the common-law mind', the authority of native laws and institutions was derived from their status as unbroken custom, and was thus dependent upon the existence of some kind of continuity between the present and the Saxon past.¹⁸ The pivotal historical dilemma here is the Norman Conquest. If William ruled by conquest and abrogated preexisting laws and customs, then it could in theory be argued that the will of kings could over-rule the customary authority of common law. Though nobody seems to have been too eager to make this particular case, there were plenty of people eager to defend against it by asserting an essential continuity of laws and institutions despite the Conquest. In practice, this continuity could be construed in multiple ways: some suggested that William really ruled by inheritance from Edward the Confessor, some that he conquered but then ratified Saxon laws.¹⁹

Sir John Hayward (often cited as a proponent of the Conquest and its absolutist implications on the strength of earlier writings) wrote in his *Lives of the III Normans* that William's victory 'bringeth no disparagement in honour' to England because 'it worketh no essentiall change. The State still remained the same, the solid bodie of the State remained still *English*: the coming in of many *Normans*, was but as Rivers falling into the Ocean; which change not the Ocean, but are confounded with the waters thereof.'²⁰ Though this kind of argument had specific ramifications for scholars like Hayward (who was trained in civil law), sentiment about conquest and the Saxon past also formed part of a more nebulous and un-theorized structure of feeling with broader popular appeal. The late, great Christopher Hill described the idea of Saxon liberty as a kind of generalized nostalgic mythos readily available to a wide range of English subjects, and the appeal of a play like *Fair Em* is best understood in terms of structures of feeling (concerning native liberties and the Norman yoke) like those that Hill describes.²¹

The comic plot of *Fair Em*, in which the Norman conqueror is absorbed into the tradition of Saxon virtue, correlates at the level of narrative with Hayward's asser-

¹⁸ Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*, 30–55. For a revision of some of Pocock's claims see J. W. Tubbs, *The Common Law Mind: Medieval and Early Modern Conceptions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000), 129–78.

¹⁹ See Kidd, *British Identities*, 75–98.

²⁰ Sir John Hayward, *The Lives of the III Normans, Kings of England* (London, 1613), 124.

²¹ Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: The English revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (1958; rpt. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), 46–111.

tion that ‘the coming in of many *Normans*, was but as Rivers falling into the Ocean; which change not the Ocean, but are confounded with the waters thereof.’ This presumably appealed to an audience who felt, at least intuitively, that Saxon liberties could be preserved so long as the personal initiatives of kings did not overstep customary boundaries. Though the play ends on a note of political harmony between King and people, its vision of England is in many ways the opposite of the essentially royalist brand of nationalism so frequently associated with the Shakespearean history play and the consolidation of the Tudor monarchy. Everything about *Fair Em* resists the impulse toward centralization, from the way the play privileges the Saxon gentry over the heroic monarch to its emphasis on its Manchester locale. Suggestively, the play is also a product of the hybridity of sixteenth-century historical culture, since its author, who had Holinshed in mind at times, concocted his basic plot by fusing material from a ballad about Em with a story about William from the novella tradition.²² The play, with its anti-royalist version of the imagined community of England, is also a product of a historical culture too unruly to be harnessed to any consolidated narrative of the past.

Edmond Ironside and the National Character in the Elizabethan Succession Crisis

If it is not just another name for *Fair Em*, it would be interesting to see the *William the Conqueror* play listed in Henslowe’s diary.²³ These are apparently the only plays written on the subject of William the Conqueror. Indeed, since *Fair Em* could accurately be described as an anti-Conquest play—it imagines the undoing of the social violence done by conquest—there is really no extant play dealing centrally with the story of the Norman Conquest. This is odd, since playwrights and audiences were evidently interested in Saxon material and since early modern playwrights seem to have been eager to stage the stories that stood as precedents for edgy constitutional inquiry. My hypothesis about the absence of any ‘Chronicle History of William the Conqueror’ is that (Hayward notwithstanding) the story of the Norman Conquest was in fact felt to bring too much disparagement to the national honor to be a popular tale. Hence, too, Shakespeare’s

²² On the play’s sources, see Henning, *Fair Em*, 38–51.

²³ R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe’s Diary* (1961; rev. edn, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 20.

apparent unwillingness to stage a successful French invasion at the end of *King Lear*, or the way he has the French refer to their English opponents as 'Norman bastards' (3.5.10) in *Henry V*: undoing the shame of William's conquest is part of the project of Shakespeare's most jingoistic play.²⁴

But concerns associated with William's conquest—concerns, that is, about the continuity of native liberties and their constitutive relationship to national identity—are handled quite explicitly in *Edmond Ironside* and *The Love-sick King*, two plays featuring the conquering Danish king Canute (who ascended to the English throne 50 years before William). In each of these plays the conquest of Canute threatens a tradition of native liberty imagined in each case as specifically Saxon in nature. Each play, moreover, is animated by tension between the idea of conquest as a rupture that threatens to undo native character and the idea of incorporation as articulated by Hayward and staged in *Fair Em*. *Edmond Ironside*—which is based primarily on Holinshed—manipulates its source in order to emphasize the absorption of Canute into the English institution of monarchy; and this plot structure is replicated in *The Love-sick King*, a later play that may or may not owe the conceit to its Elizabethan predecessor.

Though the association between Normans and Danes may seem odd to modern readers—the Danish yoke?—it is common enough within the popular historical imagination of Elizabethan England. We can see this in the comic plotting of *Fair Em*, where William absorbs the Danes and is himself absorbed by the Saxons. Here is what Holinshed's *Chronicles* have to say about the death of Edmond Ironside and the subsequent reign of Canute:

With this Edmund, surnamed Ironside, fell the glorious majestie of the English kingdome, the which afterward as it had beene an aged bodie being fore decaied and weakened by the Danes, that now got possession of the whole, yet somewhat recovered after the space of 26 yeers under king Edward, surnamed the Confessor: and shortlie thereupon as it had beene falne into a resiliuation [relapse], came to extreame ruine by the invasion and conquest of the Normans.²⁵

This association is bolstered in Holinshed by the story of the Danish origins of Normandy. The chronicle recounts the story of Rollo, a Dane who after being

²⁴ See also Williams, *The French Fetish*, 181–226. She describes Henry V as 'the ultimate reversal of the Norman conquest' (219).

²⁵ Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of England, from the time that it was first inhabited, untill the time that it was last conquered, separately paginated in volume one of The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles* (London, 1587), 178.

thwarted in his attempt to invade England sailed to France and founded Normandy.²⁶ As a result, the Danes and the Normans are actually one people, 'which the English people called by one generall name Danes, and the Frenchmen Normans'.²⁷ The Anglo-Saxonist Richard Verstegan, in his *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities* (1605), argues not only that the Normans were 'all one with the Danes' but also that, since Saxons, Danes, and Normans are all Germanic people, the intermixing of these peoples doesn't even make England 'a mixed nation'.²⁸

The anonymous late Elizabethan chronicle play *Edmond Ironside* hinges upon a conflict between the native hero Ironside and Canute over the throne of England. The former has a claim based on native royal blood while the latter has a claim based upon the conquest of England by his father, Swein. There are numerous late Elizabethan plays featuring competing claims to power (in addition to history plays, we might think of the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus*), and heightened interest in this scenario clearly has to do with concerns about Elizabeth's uncertain successor. The succession crisis, because it provoked thought about competing kinds of claims to political authority, generated interest in larger constitutional questions about the nature of the commonwealth and the relationship between monarch and people. And *Edmond Ironside*, though it is the story of a king, is primarily concerned with monarchy as it pertains to constitutional questions related to right by conquest and the countervailing rhetoric of native liberty.

The play's patriotic core, its key idea about what constitutes the imagined community of England, is signaled in the opening scene when a virtuous Danish advisor named Uskataulf advises Canute to rule moderately:

USKATAULF For they are Englishmen, easye to rule
 With lynitie, soe they bee used like men,
 Patient of right, impatient of wrong,
 Brookeinge noe tyrannie in anie sorte,
 But hateinge and revengeinge yt with death.²⁹

This advice advances the idea that the balanced English constitution, in which common law and the liberties of subjects coexist with personal monarchy,

²⁶ Ibid. 146.

²⁷ Ibid. 147.

²⁸ Richard Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (Antwerp, 1605), 165, 187.

²⁹ Randall Martin, ed., *Edmond Ironside and Anthony Brewer's The Love-sick King* (New York: Garland, 1991), 1.1.189–94. I use this text for both plays and subsequent citations in each case are given parenthetically.

is a product of the characterological makeup of English subjects: a national character. And insofar as this speech is designed to make a patriotic appeal to the play's sixteenth-century audience, its effect depends upon the assumption that this essential native character forms the link between the present and the Saxon past. Though this is a play that features a heroic native ruler, in other words, it imagines Englishness residing in a self-regulating populace that will not accept royal over-reaching. At the same time, the fact that the authors of this play felt the need to reconcile a narrative of heroic monarchy with a notion of Englishness that is in some ways opposed to a more crown-centered sense of national identity is an index to the uneasy intersection of competing forms of nationalism in late Elizabethan England.

The carefully drawn contrast between Ironside (the good native ruler) and Canute (the conquering tyrant) is central to the play's dramatic action and political imagination. Ironside's virtues are always realized in opposition to the excesses of Canute the conqueror. We can see this, for instance, in the way Ironside deals with Turkillus and Leofricke, two 'borne Englishmen' (1.3.27) who have been following Canute but rejoin their rightful king at the end of Act 1. Ironside welcomes them back with the following rousing speech:

IRONSIDE I more esteme the life of one Trew subject
 Then the distruction of a Thowsand foes;
 One sheepe that was lost I more rejoyce to find
 Then Twenty other which I never mist;
 A frinde of whose retorne I stood in doubt
 Is more welcom to mee then ffortie other.
 Oh that when Strangers cannot Conquer us
 Wee should Conspire with them against our selves.
 England yf ever warr thy face doth spoyle
 Thanke not thy outward foe but inward frind,
 For thou shalt never perishe tell that daye
 When thie right hand shall make thie harte awaye.
 Goe in, brave lordes; your sight doth mee more joye
 Then *Agamemnon* when hee Conquerd Troye. (1.3.36–48)

This is Edmond Ironside in a nutshell: a figure of clemency rather than conquest and a figurehead for a brand of nationalism organized by the idea that 'strangers cannot conquer us.' Since Canute later makes much of the idea that London is 'New Troy' (3.2.2) and compares his army to Agamemnon's (3.2.6–8), the allusion to the Greek general in Edmond's speech is instructive as well.

For one thing, we can see that the play's conception of Edmond's excellence is inextricably bound up with the idea that he is the opposite of Agamemnon or Canute. He is a figure primarily characterized here by his difference from these conquering rulers. For another, this is an unusual use of the commonplace idea of London as New Troy. This trope always invokes a genealogy of empire in which England is heir to Roman greatness, of course, but here that link is forged via a shared experience of conquest and survival. Just as Rome is the result of Troy's unconquerable spirit—despite conquest—so the persistence of native institutions into the Elizabethan present is the result of England's indomitable spirit despite the best efforts of Canute or William.

The play's depiction of Canute is a great deal more ambiguous than is its treatment of the heroic native claimant. He contains more than a dash of tyrannical passion. When Turkillus and Leofricke defect, he has their children's hands and noses cut off, prompting one of them to exclaim, 'Oh England never trust a forraine kinge' (2.3.158). But he is not all bad, and at the end of the play Canute and Ironside reconcile. Hence the play's subtitle: 'warr hath made all freinds.' Since this is represented as a good thing, we are evidently supposed to find something in the Danish conqueror worth redeeming. Actually, the end of the play is interestingly dissonant in terms of the way it manipulates our sympathies, for it juxtaposes the triumphant reconciliation of the two kings with a reminder of Canute's tyrannical treatment of Turkillus' and Leofricke's children (5.2.271–5).

To some degree these conflicting images of Canute are rendered compatible by the way the play deploys the wicked Edricus, an Englishman who is a Machiavellian schemer and who tries to play each of the kings against the other for his own benefit. He makes a convenient scapegoat, and insofar as he is responsible for misadvising Canute it is possible to imagine the latter being reformed at the end of the play. At least that is how the play tries to use him. But Edricus is an imperfect scapegoat; he is not really shown to be responsible for all of Canute's wickedness. And though the play suggests that Edricus' treachery paved the way for the conquest of England in the story's prehistory, Canute's brand of tyranny is associated so persistently with the problem of conquest and with foreignness ('Oh England never trust a forraine kinge') that it cannot really be fobbed off entirely on the treacherous native counselor.

In the play's first act, Canute receives a visit from a group of commoners who enter shouting, 'where is the kinge that hee may right our wronge?' (1.1.98). At first this looks like a scene of regal care, a demonstration of the king's gracious

love of his subjects, for Canute responds, 'The kinge is heere, whoe is yt Calls the kinge? | I am your kinge, speake, gentle Cuntrymen, | What laules hand hath done you injurie' (1.1.99–101). But—and this is supposed to come as a small surprise to the audience—the commoners are in fact Danes and their complaint is that the English are insufficiently servile:

Renowned Canutus, wee are all Daines by birth,
 The remanant of thie needye followers,
 Whoe when thie father lived, lived here securer
 And dwelt amongst the fatest of this land.
 Wee then did yoake the *Saxons* and Compeld
 Their stoborne neckes to eare the fallow feildes;
 Wee then did force them honor us as lordes
 And bee our slaves, our Drudges and our Dogges.
 But now, I know not what the Cause shold bee
 Unles the instigation of their prince
 Younge Ironside, or ells their stoborne nature,
 They all rebell. (1.1.102–13)

Canute promises to return them to their former eminence, a promise unlikely to win any sympathy with the play's original audience. This is quite literally the language of the Norman yoke transposed onto Canute and the Danes, and the excessiveness of the conquerors' tyranny toward their English slaves is not excused by noting Edricus' perfidiousness.

Finally, the play's Canute is incoherent at the level of character. He is at once a loathsome, tyrannical conqueror and a high-spirited but noble ruler misled by wicked counsel. But rather than chalk this ambiguity up to authorial incompetence, say, or to the absence of a missing part two, I think we can see that what is incoherent at the level of character actually makes a great deal of sense in terms of the play's larger socio-political brief, which in this case has to do quite clearly with the Elizabethan succession crisis.³⁰ This is implicit in the play's warning against foreign princes, but it is possible to be a great deal more precise than that about how the play interacts with contemporary concerns if we attend to the rather odd way in which conquest theory is deployed in the play's opening speeches.

The play opens with a long speech by Canute, who invokes 'the due my fathers Conquest Claymes' (1.1.8) but also speaks as if the 'free Consent' of English

³⁰ Scragg, 'Saxons versus Danes', 105.

peers conferred authority (1.1.5). Even in the context of a longer speech this feels mildly oxymoronic, since rule by conquest is the antithesis of rule by consent. Things become curiouser and curiouser when Canute's claim is backed up by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who angrily accuses Ironside of disregarding the English clergy and peerage who have 'for publique proffitt of the Realme, | For peace, for quiet and utilitie, | Elected prince Canutus for our kinge' (1.1.24–6). Why all the talk of consent and election in support of a monarch who claims to rule by conquest?

The answer, I think, lies in late Elizabethan arguments in which conquest was adduced to show a break with Saxon tradition and thus to disable the argument that blood inheritance was the *sine qua non* of succession. If inheritance as the exclusive basis for succession is not authorized by immemorial custom, then it follows that England might be free to elect a successor to Elizabeth. This is one argument put forward, for example, in Robert Parsons' notorious tract *A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, where in fact the same basic point is also made in terms of the turbulent history of the English monarchy during the period of Danish occupation:

He that wil consider the passing of the crowne of England, from the death of Edmonde Ironside, elder sonne of king Eltheldred, until the possession therof gotten by William Duke of Normandie, to wit for the space of 50 yeares, shal easely see what authority the common wealth hath in such affaires, to alter titles of succession, according as publique necessity or utility shal require.³¹

For Parsons, this is part of a complex argument against the claim of James VI—the strongest claim by blood—and in favor of the Spanish Infanta. Because the history of monarchy is fraught with conquest and upheaval, the tract argues, there is no clear precedent that needs to be followed. The fact that this kind of argument was in the air c.1595 helps make sense of what looks at first like an untenable link between election and conquest at the beginning of *Edmond Ironside*: for Parsons and his constituents the two went together because the fact of ancient conquest actually underwrites calls for elective succession in the present.

One could in fact read *Edmond Ironside* as a response to the arguments put forward in Parsons' controversial tract. To be clear: I am not here concerned to show that this is literally the case, since among other things we do not know

³¹ R. Doleman, *A Conference About the Next Succession To The Crowne of England* ('Imprinted at N.' [Antwerp], 1594), part 1, 185. This text was composed by the Jesuit Robert Parsons in late 1593, printed in Antwerp, and then circulated (under the nom de plume Doleman) in England in 1595.

for sure when exactly the play was written and performed. But if we take Parsons' *Conference* as indicative of the kinds of arguments available to Catholic polemicists during the succession crisis, then noting how *Edmond Ironside* seems to respond to them can help illuminate the political brief of the play. Where Parsons argues (on the basis of conquest, among other things) for the election of a foreign prince instead of James VI, the play warns against foreign princes and celebrates the native monarchy of a figure—Ironside—from whom James VI actually traced his lineage.³² This basic reading is bolstered by a short scene in which Canterbury argues over royal legitimacy with the Archbishop of York. The former urges his colleague to 'cleave unto Canutus, and more submit thie self | To mee thie head and to our mother Church' (3.1.34–5). But York, sounding anachronistically Protestant and claiming that his allegiance is to god and country rather than to the Catholic church, declares, 'Oh lett mee dye whenas I leave my kinge, | A trew borne prince, for anie forriner' (3.1.40–1). I think it would have been hard to watch this scene, in the 1590s, without being reminded of the succession controversy and in particular of competing claims for the Protestant James VI and the Catholic Infanta.

This helps explain what is at stake for contemporary audiences in the contest between Ironside and Canute, but it does not explain the oddly dissonant reconciliation with which the play ends. To understand that I think we need to remember the associative logic linking Canute to William and the general importance of the latter in thinking about the ancient constitution and the continuity of English institutions. It is worth pointing out here that Parsons, on a number of occasions in *A Conference*, treats Canute and William as parallel figures from England's past.³³ At any rate, I think the parallel is invoked, powerfully if implicitly, by the play's obsessive invocation of the idea of right by conquest.

With that said, it is not a coincidence that this play features the same basic narrative of incorporation characteristic of writings about William the Conqueror like Hayward's *Lives of the III Normans* or *Fair Em*. The reconciliation between Ironside and Canute is very carefully scripted: Ironside meets Canute in single combat, drubs him soundly, and then they all become friends. There can be no question, therefore, about the English king's essential victory. This ratifies the native claim, making it clear that the resulting friendship is offered by the English from

³² See Martin, ed., *Edmond*, 173.

³³ Parsons discusses Canute and William as fellow conquerors (*A Conference*, part 2, 125, 204–6, and 223).

a position of physical and moral superiority. As a result, the reconciliation at the end of the play makes sense primarily as a fantasy expression of the persistence of native liberty, an encoded rebuttal of the threat posed to this by the idea of conquest. In the chronicles, Canute did rule England by himself after the death of Ironside as a precursor to William the Conqueror. But the conclusion to *Edmond Ironside* implies that (in Hayward's phrase) 'the solid bodie of the State remained still *English*' and that the coming in of many Danes was likewise 'but as Rivers falling into the Ocean; which change not the Ocean, but are confounded with the waters thereof.'

This also helps explain the dramatic purpose of the otherwise tangential scene (4.2) in which Queen Emma, the stepmother of Edmund Ironside, sends her two children off to her brother Richard, duke of Normandy for safekeeping. Richard is the grandfather of William the Conqueror, and one of the children is Edward the Confessor.³⁴ This scene, of course, has everything to do with the play's subtextual interest in William, and by invoking the close connections between England and Normandy it hints at a larger narrative of incorporation in which William too, like Canute, becomes part of England.

Because conquest has implications for the legitimacy of native institutions, the play's emphasis on incorporation is part of its larger response to the Elizabethan succession crisis. That is, the play insists upon England's ocean-like ability to absorb Canute (and by extension, William) and this in turn serves as an implicit defense of a nationalistic idea—that England's monarchy and balanced constitution are essentially native institutions—of urgent concern during the 1590s. The play's response to the succession crisis is at once direct and theoretical. It stages a conflict between a native king and foreign tyrant designed directly to invoke controversy surrounding contemporary claimants. And its narrative of incorporation amounts to a theoretical defense of an idea of English monarchy as part of a balanced constitution protective of native liberties. For these subjects, recall, 'are Englishmen' and are therefore 'Patient of right, impatient of wrong | Brookeinge noe tyrannie in anie sorte.' In the process, Canute is pressed into double duty. Insofar as he is the wicked foreign claimant he is to be shunned and hated, but insofar as he represents

³⁴ Parsons explains: 'The second wife of *Etheldred* was called Emma, sister to Richard Duke of Normandie, who was grand father to William the conqueror, to witt, father to Duke Robert, that was father to William, so as Emma was great aunt to this William, and she bare unto king *Etheldred* two sonnes, the first Edward, who was afterward named king Edward the Confessor, and *Alerud* who was slayne traiterously by the Earle of kent, as presently we shal shew' (*A Conference*, part 1, 184).

the problematic of conquest he must be absorbed into the native tradition. This is why the character is by turns a tyrant to the English and their friend. Dissonance at the level of plot and character, in other words, is symptomatic of strains and incompatibilities within the larger ideological project that the play undertakes. This project, ultimately, is to support an idea of limited native monarchy compatible with a brand of Saxon nostalgia which in turn locates the essence of the nation not in the achievements of its king but the character of its subjects.

British England and *The Love-Sick King*

Though it is a very different kind of play written in very different circumstances, Brewer's *The Love-sick King* features a (by now) familiar narrative of conquest and absorption. It begins with the utter defeat of the English by Canute—'this day the kingdom's wholly conquered' (1.1.21)—and ends with the defeated Danish king welcomed into a brotherhood of amity with the English after being re-conquered by them. This reconciliation is made possible, dramatically speaking, because the English king who defeats Canute—Alured, anachronistically, instead of Ironside—has had a love affair with a virtuous Danish princess named Elgina, who is then accidentally killed in the body of the play. Elgina lays the affective groundwork for reconciliation early on when she announces, in Act 1, that she is as much English as Danish by virtue of having been brought up on English soil (1.3.242–50). When Alured has Canute at his mercy in Act 5, he pardons his erstwhile enemy out of respect for Elgina's memory.

As in *Edmond Ironside*, the reconciliation at the end of the play comes as something of a surprise. Brewer's Canute is even less sympathetic than the figure from the earlier play, and the main source for Brewer's Canute is the legend of the Grand Turk Mohomet, who fell in love during the sack of Constantinople.³⁵ Noting the source gives some insight into Brewer's characterization of Canute: he is a tyrant of the sort associated in England with eastern despotism. After conquering the English he orders his followers to 'whip out this English Race' by killing every man, woman, and child they come upon. As Canute himself is busily murdering

³⁵ Robert W. Dent, 'The Love-sick King: Turk Turned Dane', *Modern Language Review* 56 (1961), 555–7. McMullan reads Brewer's use of this story as a marker for the alterity of Danes ('The Colonisation', 126–7). See also Martin, ed., *Edmond*, 179–83.

the helpless, he falls for an English nun named Cartesmunda, whom he woos for much of the play, finally wins, and then accidentally kills in another fit of passion. Much is made in the play of the idea that wooing Cartesmunda is an alternative kind of conquest, and we see that the unruly passion of love takes the place of the ambition and bloodlust that have driven Canute to become a conqueror.

Though Brewer plays fast and loose with history, conflating Danish and English figures from different centuries and drawing liberally from romance plots, it is clear that he is drawn to the figure of Canute by an interest in the idea of conquest. The word appears with near-comic frequency whenever Canute is onstage. Brewer's Canute is both an over-passionate tyrant and Saxon-era conqueror, and we are by now in a position to recognize a deeper cultural logic underpinning this association: if Saxon England was 'wholly conquered', then the King's will thereafter supersedes law and custom. The fact of conquest in the past could therefore underwrite tyrannical rule in the present. This is also the cultural logic by which the otherwise-weird reconciliation scene at the end of the play could have felt appropriate to a celebration of native customs and liberties: if the conqueror is absorbed into the celebration of British monarchy, then in a sense the continuity of native institutions is preserved. Accordingly, Brewer's play ends with the defeat of Canute by the united forces of Scotland and England. The Scottish king takes the crown from the Danish invader and offers it to Alured, declaring, 'we take the English Crown and plant it here, | To whom in right it legally belongs' (5.2.50–1). Like *Edmond Ironside*, the play gives us a triumphant English king while also arranging a rapprochement between the native king and erstwhile conqueror that is itself an important historical pretext for an idea of balanced monarchy that the play espouses.

As with *Ironside*, this play's understanding of British monarchy as a Saxon institution is designed as a gesture of national self-fashioning offered in response to a problem of national self-definition. In this case, as the military union celebrated between England and Scotland suggests, the play's nationalism is designed to appeal to King James and to respond to the need for a specifically British history compatible with the idea of Saxon liberties.³⁶ Here is the English king Alured, speaking to the Scottish king at the end of the play:

ALURED	The sea that binds us in one Continent, Doth teach us to imbrace two hearts in one, To strengthen both 'gainst all invasion.	(5.2.127–9)
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³⁶ McMullan also reads the play as an attempt to reconcile British monarchy with Saxon national identity ('The Colonisation').

I am persuaded by the suggestion that the play was written for the occasion of James' visit to Newcastle in 1617, for the play is also preoccupied with the glories of Newcastle and larded with local lore.³⁷ We might, then, see the play as a kind of mirror image of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which Edward the Confessor helps the Scots expunge Macbeth's tyranny. Since King Edward (as Janelle Greenberg has recently argued) is the Saxon king most powerfully associated with the sanctity of common law and the ancient constitution, it is possible to read Shakespeare's play in Jacobean terms as a dramatic argument for the ancient legal union between the two nations: if Edward was so closely allied with Malcolm, then maybe it makes historical sense to include the Scots under the umbrella of English common law.³⁸ Brewer's play likewise casts the English/Scottish alliance as a matter of ancient history, and treats it as a bulwark against conquest and tyranny. James, as king in both realms, becomes the perfect embodiment of a specifically native British monarchy, strengthened by union, that is given as the opposite of Canute's over-passionate tyranny.

The Love-sick King also features a comic subplot, based loosely upon a Newcastle legend, in which a peddler named Thornton comes into fantastic wealth and is transformed almost overnight from the poorest of traveling salesmen into the richest subject in England. The play's modern editor is undoubtedly correct to argue that this plot is added in the spirit of civic rivalry, in order to create a Newcastle alternative to the London-based tale of Dick Whittington.³⁹ But as in *Fair Em*, the sentimental jointure between national politics and local color is underwritten by a Saxon sense of Englishness which resists centralization. Here, the two plots come together on the eve of the climactic battle between Alured and Canute, when the former finds respite and support in Newcastle and Thornton bankrolls Alured's army. This is particularly appropriate for the occasion of a state visit to Newcastle, for the whole scene provides an opportunity to celebrate that city's traditional importance to the national cause. Alured even casts the heroic fortitude of Newcastle as counterweight to the shame of conquest, declaring:

ALURED Our countries conquest by these Danish wars
 Have not such blazon from our shame exhal'd,
 As these your good deeds now have countervail'd. (4.3.106)

³⁷ Hope M. Dodds, 'Edmond Ironside and *The Love-sick King*', *Modern Language Review* 19 (1924), 158–68. On Newcastle material, see Martin, ed., *Edmond*, 175–8.

³⁸ Greenberg, *Radical Face*. On the use of this material in debates about the union see 119–33.

³⁹ Martin, ed., *Edmond*, 177–8.

Beyond this rather transparent expression of civic pride, however, what is interesting about the Thornton plot is the way its values dovetail with those at stake in the conflict between Canute and Alured. We are supposed to intuit that the mercantile values embodied by Thornton—he is acquisitive without being a conqueror, wealthy without being a hoarder—are the antithesis of Canute's brand of tyranny. There is something quintessentially greedy and miserly about the way Canute dotes upon Cartesmunda. He lavishes the wealth of a realm upon her but keeps her hidden from all other men. In general—and in this he resembles other besotted stage tyrants, from Marlowe's Tamburlaine to Massinger's Domitian—Canute treats the singular richness of Cartesmunda's beauty as a sign of his own unique status: having sole possession of such beauty reinforces the tyrant's sense of his own unparalleled magnificence. By contrast, when Thornton considers marrying a wealthy widow, he worries that 'the marriage of so much wealth as ours compounded, would choak all content, and with the superflux change all to cares' (3.3.80–1). To prevent this, he becomes a figure of aggressive charity, giving money for public works as well as for Alured's army. He embodies a kind of civic-minded generosity that is the lifeblood of a commonwealth. This is of course readily compatible with the contrast between Alured and Canute, or between constitutional monarchy and absolutism, for it celebrates reciprocal generosity as the key public virtue.

The play, then, contrasts conquest and tyranny with both native monarchy and the values of mercantilism. The result—as embodied by the reciprocal admiration and support between Alured and Thornton—is a cocktail of patriotic assertions linking the British union to native liberty and thence to localism and the triumph of English merchants. Mercantile expansion is an alternative form of imperialism, one conceptualized here—in contrast to the rapaciousness of Canute the conqueror—as a rising tide that lifts all boats. This, then, is how I see the ceremonial brief of Brewer's play. First, in staging the defeat and absorption of the conqueror it invokes the compelling idea of Saxon liberty and uses it as the affective platform upon which to mount a celebration of the Jacobean rule of Britain. Second, by linking mercantilism to an ancient tradition of political liberty, it labors to create a historical or mythic framework for the celebration of Newcastle commerce as the lynchpin of the commonwealth.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean plays that I have discussed here hinge on an idea of Englishness that runs parallel to thinking about the continuity of common

law and the ancient constitution, but that also sees Saxon virtue as the key to something like a national character. This figuration of the national character survives, of course, and is later transformed into a powerfully unifying nationalist mythos—what Balibar calls a 'fictive ethnicity'—from the strong oppositional rhetoric of the Norman yoke in the mid-seventeenth century to the racialized notion of England's Teutonic origins prevalent in the nineteenth.⁴⁰ But what is striking about the way these earlier plays deploy the idea of Saxon virtue is how their emphases run counter to the centralizing tendencies typically associated with the ideology of early modern monarchy as an affective focus for proto-nationalist sentiment. This is not to say that they are in any concrete sense opposed to kings, but rather that they privilege a version of Englishness emphasizing the local (Em's Manchester locale, the merchant of Newcastle), traditional limits on royal authority, and the perspectives of commoners and gentry.

Ernest Gellner, in his influential 1983 study of *Nations and Nationalism* argues that pre-industrial societies are too segmented (by locality and by caste) to generate what he calls the 'cultural imperialisms' inherent in modern nationalist culture: 'the efforts of one culture or another to dominate and expand to fill out a political unit'.⁴¹ Certainly there were such efforts in early modern England, from Shakespeare's imaginary vision of England as a band of brothers united under a heroic king, to the real Tudor project of expanding the language of direct obligation to the Crown outward to subjects beyond those so implicated by traditional structures of obligation.⁴² But the plays I have discussed here both dramatize a resistance to centralizing cultural imperialism (in that the native cannot be overcome by the force of monarchical conquest) and are themselves products of a historical culture so varied and heterogeneous as to resist streamlining or centralization (in that eleventh-century stories coexist with late medieval ones as competing resources for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideas of national identity).

This case study in the figuration of Englishness has implications, I think, for the narrative of emergent nationalism we tend to use to emphasize the modernity of the early modern. In particular, we need to remember that there are multiple ways of imagining the nation, that they do not necessarily

⁴⁰ Balibar, 'The Nation Form', 96.

⁴¹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 12.

⁴² See, for example, Judith M. Richards, 'Love and a Female Monarch: The case of Elizabeth Tudor', in *Journal of British Studies* 38:2 (1999), 133–60.

dovetail with one another, and that this situation is enabled by a historical culture that can seem, to us, impossibly undifferentiated. What is distinctive about the period's discourse of national identity, we might say, has more to do with a deep, self-conscious interest in the multiple and conflicting implications of medieval history for the imagined community of England than with the invention or consolidation of any single nationalist idea. The story of early modern England's emergent nationalism, in other words, is really a story about the narrative plenitude of its medieval past.

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PART III

SHAKESPEARE AND THE
RESOURCES OF MEDIEVAL
CULTURE

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King Lear and the Summons of Death

Michael O'Connell

Among playwrights contemporary with him, Shakespeare's interest in what we call medieval drama is striking and in many ways unique. He wouldn't have known it as 'medieval'—for him it was theater that had endured and continued into his own lifetime—but he recognizes its character as belonging to an earlier and aesthetically distinct period. Significantly, he is fascinated by what it accomplished and the ways in which he can transmute it in his own theater. While he appears sometimes to judge its traditions as naive, he at the same time accords it a certain power and attraction that allow his allusions to it to ground or shade his own art. While I want to develop an argument about *King Lear* and its relation to the morality tradition, I shall first advance a suggestion why Shakespeare was more affected than other contemporary playwrights by what we identify as medieval drama. Because of his generational and geographic positioning, he bears among those contemporaries a unique and particular relation to the tradition of mystery plays. John Lyly, born around 1554; Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd, and George Peele, all born in 1558; and Christopher Marlowe, born the same year as Shakespeare, 1564, were old enough, as boys and adolescents, to have experienced the final performances of the great cycles of fifteenth-century Corpus Christi and Whitsuntide plays. But Lyly, Kyd, and Peele grew up in London, where there is no record of cycle plays having been performed since the early fifteenth century and

Marlowe in Canterbury, which was similarly devoid of cycle plays after the late fifteenth century.¹ While Greene came from Norwich, which had a Whitsun play, it was discontinued in 1565 when Greene was only six or seven.² Thus it appears unlikely that any of them could have witnessed the epic theater that the mystery plays were, even though some cycles were still being played in the Midlands and North of England into nearly the middle of Elizabeth's reign. Ben Jonson was a Londoner born eight years after Shakespeare, and for both reasons could not have directly experienced the mystery cycles. And a similar situation obtains with Thomas Dekker, born around 1570 in London, and Thomas Heywood, born in Lincolnshire, but ten years after Shakespeare.

By contrast, Shakespeare certainly knew and experienced the Coventry Corpus Christi theater, probably several times, in his boyhood and adolescence. Coventry was the best known of the English cycles, having been visited by Queen Margaret in 1457, by Richard III in 1485, and by Henry VII in 1487 and 1493.³ Its final performance took place in 1579, when Shakespeare was fifteen.⁴ Moreover, the city's proximity to Stratford and the fact of Shakespeare's familiarity with the mysteries, discernible in scattered references in his plays, make it virtually certain that he saw performances at Coventry in the 1570s. A well-known stage direction in one of the two surviving Coventry plays, 'Here Erode ragis in the pagond and in the strete also,'⁵ connects with Hamlet's advice to the players not

¹ Biblical plays were performed over several days at Clerkenwell, or Skinners Well, in London from the 1380s until the second decade of the fifteenth century; see Ian Lancaster, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 113, records 544–9, and Alan H. Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage: Corpus Christ Pageants and Plays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974), 171–3. A passion play was performed at New Romney in Kent from the 1460s until 1560 for certain and probably in 1562; an enigmatic record suggests it may have been performed in 1568, but not after. See *Kent: Diocese of Canterbury*, Records of Early English Drama, ed. James M. Gibson (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002), lix–lxiv, and Lancaster, *Dramatic Texts*, 233–4, records 1205–9.

² See Nelson, *The Medieval English Stage*, 131–5, and *Norwich*, Records of Early English Drama, ed. David Galloway (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984) for the final record of the Norwich Whitsun play (51, 52–3) including an inventory of the pageant wagon, costumes, and properties of the Grocers' company.

³ See *Coventry*, Records of Early English Drama, ed. R. W. Ingram (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1983), 37, 67–8, 77.

⁴ A reference in the City Annals for 1580 notes simply, 'and this yeare the padgins were layd downe,' and though scattered references to pageant wagons occur subsequently, the Coventry Corpus Christi play is not mentioned again (*Coventry*, 294).

⁵ *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Pamela M. King and Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 105.

to rant in their performance: 'I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it' (3.1.12–14). While the mystery Herod was always a part to tear a cat in, it was famously so at Coventry.

But Shakespeare's references to the mysteries suggest an altogether different sort of familiarity than what we usually associate with a playwright and his sources. This was theater he saw as a boy, perhaps the first theater he ever saw, and it had powerful religious associations. The impression it left shows itself in various corners of his plays, oftentimes in ways that are hard to disentangle from simple biblical references. For example, in *Hamlet* Claudius likens the murder he has committed to Cain's killing of Abel: 'O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven; | It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, | A brother's murder' (3.3.36–8). An allusion to the book of Genesis, yes, but that the *rank* offence *smells* to heaven suggests an imaginative fusion of the motivation for Cain's murder with its effect, the scene in the cycle plays in which the smoke of Cain's sacrifice, probably produced by damp straw, spreads offensively over the audience and is rejected by God. The influence of this theater on Shakespeare's imagination is entirely theatrical and entirely memorial; he would not, could not, have known it in texts, and he could not have seen it again in his adulthood.

I have argued elsewhere that the mystery cycles, despite their suppression by the ecclesiastical authorities in the 1560s and 1570s remained vitally present to the next generation of theatergoers, even those who could not have experienced them directly, that they remained a cultural memory of some force in an England that still represented varieties of religious understanding and belief.⁶ In Shakespeare's imagination memories of the cycle plays appear to exist as individual moments, rarely connected by an overarching design. Sometimes the moment is comic, even inconsequential, like Simple's assertion to Mistress Quickly in *Merry Wives of Windsor* that Slender has 'a little yellow beard—a Cain-colored beard' (1.2.22), or Mistress Quickly's exclamation that Falstaff's lame verses, and presumably his perfidy, make him 'a Herod of Jewry' (2.2.20). The references serve to indicate as well an audience's continued cultural memory of roles and costumes from a theater that no one had seen for over twenty years.

Because the cycle, except for the pageant of the Shearmen and the Taylors and that of the Weavers, is lost, we cannot know for certain what it is that the young

⁶ 'Vital Cultural Practices: Shakespeare and the Mysteries', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 149–68.

Shakespeare saw in Coventry in the years leading up to 1579. Its loss makes it the great missing link between one theater and another. For this reason much must be conjectured from our knowledge of other play cycles, so there will always be an element of imprecision in what we see behind scenes and moments in Shakespeare's plays. But the scene in *Macbeth* in which the drunken porter plays the porter of hell gate finds oblique confirmation of its relation to the Coventry cycle in John Heywood's *The Four PP* (printed 1544). There a Pardoner tells an amusing story of his journey to hell, where he meets an acquaintance, who had played the devil at Coventry.⁷ The comic tenor of the story suggests that the Harrowing of Hell play in the Coventry cycle may have contained a comic episode at the gate of hell as Christ comes to release the souls of the patriarchs.⁸ The scene in *Macbeth* perhaps reiterates that comic tone in the porter's drunken discourse about equivocation, while thematically the episode turns Macbeth's castle into hell, made so now by Duncan's murder. *Macbeth* in fact contains a number of moments that appear to draw upon the cycle plays. The dead Banquo's appearance at Macbeth's feast resembles the scene in the *N-Town* play in which Mors, Death, comes to Herod's banquet after the killing of the children. The killing of Macduff's wife and children suggests a further analogy between Macbeth and Herod. Macbeth's calling for his armor as Macduff assaults his castle resembles Satan's calling for armor in the Towneley/Wakefield Harrowing of Hell (and in fact Macbeth's servant is called 'Seyton', indistinguishable to the ear from 'Satan').

What I want to suggest here is that this familiarity with one form of early drama imparted a deep and abiding interest in earlier drama in general and specifically in another sort of theater that endured into Shakespeare's early adulthood. The morality drama was not subject to the same official strictures and eventual elimination as the biblical theater was because it was not as mired in religious controversy. As I have argued elsewhere, the biblical theater fell under the strictures against representation and was reprehended as 'idolatrous' by reformers and the anti-theatrical writers in the 1580s.⁹ But the morality

⁷ *The Plays of John Heywood*, ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), 132.

⁸ A comic element pervades the Northern cycle pageants of the Harrowing of Hell. In York and Towneley, which essentially share the same Harrowing play, the devils are comically unable to withstand Christ's entry and are thrown into confusion. The Chester Harrowing contains a comic, if anti-feminist, final moment when a corrupt alewife must stay behind with Satan because of her sins.

⁹ *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 14–35.

drama did not involve the representation of biblical narratives and was able to develop in a variety of directions, plays on the education of youth, for example, and consequently continued as a dramatic tradition through the 1580s. Of course the assertion of Shakespeare's familiarity with this drama is scarcely a revelation; the morality dimensions of characters like Iago and Falstaff are well known.¹⁰ But I want to argue that the most thorough-going relation—and the one most insistently charged with meaning for the play itself—is that established in *King Lear*.¹¹

It is no exaggeration to say that *King Lear* is as conscious of this morality tradition as *Hamlet* is of the contemporary London theater world. Hamlet—or the actor playing Hamlet?—jokes about the ghost being 'this fellow in the cellerage' (1.4.151), points to the architectural elements of the recently built Globe (2.2.305–11), asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about the war of the theaters (2.2.335–69), and of course discusses acting technique at some length with the players (3.2.1–45). A similar self-consciousness about the dramatic enterprise comes when Edmund jokes about the first entrance of Edgar. In the quarto text he names Edgar, Edgar enters, and Edmund comments, 'And pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o' Bedlam' (1.2.134–6). Tom o' Bedlam will later make a pat entrance himself when Lear on the heath prays for the 'poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are | That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm' (3.4.28–9), but for now Edmund's self-identification with the role of the villain is strikingly accurate. The disguised Kent assigns Oswald a dramatic ancestry as he assaults him verbally and literally, 'You come with letters against the King and take Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father' (2.2.35–7). As he identifies Oswald as playing Vanity, he appears to give himself the role of Plain Speech or Honest Dealing in the morality he is constructing in the scene. As he draws his sword and demands that Oswald do the same, his allegorical self-definition might be seen to metamorphose to Courage or Manhood, actually vice characters, against Oswald's understandable reluctance to engage with him.

¹⁰ Willard Farnham reviewed the traditions in *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1936), though his discussion of the relations is more general than specific. See also David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965).

¹¹ An important brief discussion of the morality background of *King Lear* is that of Maynard Mack, *King Lear in Our Time* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), 55–63. See also Alvin B. Kernan, 'Formalism and Realism in Elizabethan Drama: The Miracles in *King Lear*', *Renaissance Drama* 9 (1966), 59–66.

Such movement to moral polarities seems in fact an almost constant feature of *King Lear*; rather than a psychologically realistic response, the play often moves toward extreme or exaggerated responses that suggest the emblematic nature of characters. When Cornwall and Gloucester ask Kent for an explanation of his behavior to Oswald, he responds, 'No contraries hold more antipathy | Than I and such a knave' (2.2.87–8). 'Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain' (2.2.92), he says to Cornwall. Since the first scene of the play, Kent plays the part of the Good Counsel, the one who will speak the truth to his king even if it means banishment or death. Perhaps ironically it had been Lear who demanded plainness. When Kent had begun ceremoniously:

KENT Royal Lear,
 Whom I have ever honored as my king,
 Loved as my father, as my master follow'd,
 As my great patron thought on in my prayers—

Lear insists on bluntness: 'The bow is bent and drawn, make from the shaft' (1.1.139–43). Henceforth, Kent is Plain Speech, as if the flattery of Goneril and Regan and Lear's susceptibility to it drive him to the opposite pole. Kent may have other morality roles to fulfill, but this one in the scene with Oswald and Cornwall is enough to land him in the stocks. And this too is a motif from the morality plays.¹² In *Hyckescorner* three vice characters put Pity into leg irons and leave him on the stage to discourse about contemporary sins until Contemplation and Perseverance release him. In *An Enterlude of Youth* Riot and Pride put Charity in the stocks until Humility sets him free. In *Impatient Poverty* Peace is threatened with the stocks by Prosperity.

The role of the Fool too derives from the morality tradition. While his more remote stage ancestors may be the buffoon vices New Guise, Nought, and Now-a-days from *Mankind*, who torment the eponymous central character, the nonsense and seeming nonsense of his bitter jests derive more immediately from morality vices named Courage, Mirth, Lust, Folly, and Riot of mid-century interludes. The Fool has been transformed in the tragedy, and whatever the limits of his perception, he does not seem a Vice. He possesses not only the cynical understanding of the old morality vices, but the worldly wisdom of the Virtue characters in the later interludes. The speech the Fool tries to teach Lear shortly after the division of the kingdom evokes the sort of

¹² As Mack noted in *King Lear in Our Time*, 56–7.

morality prudence of these plays, in which virtue is duly rewarded by worldly prosperity:

FOOL Mark it, nuncle:
 Have more than showest,
 Speak less than thou knowest,
 Lend less than thou owest,
 Ride more than thou goest,
 Learn more than thou trowest,
 Set less than thou throwest;
 Leave thy drink and thy whore
 And keep in a' door,
 And thou shalt have more
 Than two tens in a score. (1.4.115–27)

'This is nothing, fool,' says Kent, and the Fool's quick retort, 'Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer, you gave me nothing for it,' indicates the irony with which he views this sort of quasi-prudent, half-nonsensical advice (1.4.128, 129–30). But the Fool himself never goes beyond the irony. This and others of the Fool's rhymes and songs sound very like scraps culled from these late moralities:

FOOL Fools had ne'er less grace in a year,
 For wise men are grown foppish,
 And know not how their wits to wear,
 Their manners are so apish. (1.4.166–9)

 He that keeps nor crust nor crumb,
 Weary of all, shall want some. (1.4.198–9)

 Fathers that wear rags
 Do make their children blind,
 But fathers that bear
 Shall see their children kind:
 Fortune, that arrant whore,
 Ne'er turns the key to the poor. (2.4.48–53)

When Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, begins a snatch of song included in William Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art*, the Fool picks it up and parodies it (3.6.25–8). While actual analogues for most of the Fool's rhymes have not been found in known printed moralities, anyone who has read a number of them will recognize what is being parodied in the Fool's fooling. Whether

the lines represent actual borrowings or are imitations, they evoke the tradition of mid-century moralities that continued to be played in the 1580s.

The role that Edgar chooses for himself drives him to an extreme that sets him, like Kent's self-assumed role as Plain Speech, in polar opposition to the forces that oppose him. There is, as has been frequently noted, no reason why Edgar should choose so bizarre and uncomfortable a role as Poor Tom. The heir of a duke, he becomes a bedlam beggar; the brother of a Machiavellian skeptic, he becomes a deranged parody of the repentant mankind of the earliest sort of morality. As this figure of repentance, he has committed all the deadly sins and is beset by Harsnett's fiends; like the central figure of the morality, he is tempted by Despair, who offers him knives, halters, and poison. It is as if the structure of the play pushes his opposition to Edmund's scoffing rejection of superstition to this extreme of superstition and draws him to the role he plays before Lear of 'unaccommodated man', unaccommodated in mind as well as body. But interestingly for my concerns, Edgar's portrayal of basic humanity, 'the thing itself', represents as well a reversion to the earliest and most basic dramatic tradition Shakespeare knew. By playing a repentant Mankind, Edgar pushes morality traditions back behind the bourgeois moralities that the Fool invokes. The stocking of Kent, then the Fool's mocking rhymes, and finally Edgar's portrayal of a deranged, repentant mankind seem to lead us back successively to the dramatic traditions of the fifteenth century.

While not part of this demotic tradition, John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* provides further indication of the ways in which the large patterns in *Lear* replicate elements of the morality tradition. Again, I do not want to suggest a direct linkage or that *Magnyfycence* was a source for *Lear*, though the literary character of the play, Skelton's reputation, and that fact that it was printed make Shakespeare's knowledge of it a possibility. The protagonists of both plays are kings who lack self-knowledge. 'He knewe not hymselfe, his harte was so hye,' Adversyte says of *Magnyfycence* after the latter is beaten down and stripped.¹³ His pride is such that Fanny, Folly, and the other vices delude him with slight disguises. At the end of the first scene of *King Lear* Goneril and Regan comment on their father's behavior. 'Tis the infirmity of his age,' Regan suggests, 'Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.' And Goneril agrees, 'The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash' (1.1.293–6). Two scenes later Lear asks, with more irony than he intends, 'Who is

¹³ *Four Morality Plays*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), line 1888. Subsequent citations of *Magnyfycence* are of this edition and will be cited by line number.

it can tell me who I am?' and the Fool replies, 'Lear's shadow.' (1.4.230–1). Lear's achievement of self-knowledge, as well as knowledge of what a king should know of justice and rule, are the business of the next three acts. The imprisonment of his counselor Measure by the deluded king of Skelton's play parallels the banishment of the truth-speaking Kent, both incidents indicating the kings' states of mind. But perhaps the suffering of the two kings provides the most suggestive relation between the plays. While Lear's madness has no actual analogue in *Magnyfycence*, or any other morality for that matter, the two kings undergo the similar physical suffering as a result of their mistakes. As the deceptions of the vices in Skelton's play are disclosed and Adversyte comes on stage, Magnyfycence cries out, 'Lorde, so my flesshe trymblyth nowe for drede!' It is at this point that the stage direction reads, 'Here Magnyfycence is beten downe and spoylyd from all his goodys and rayment' (1875ff). After Adversyte delivers a monologue describing the manifold suffering he brings, which includes striking his victims 'with a franesy' (1932), Poverty enters and according to the stage direction casts the king down onto the stage rushes. Poverty complains that, like Edgar's Poor Tom, he is 'bayted with doggys at every mannys gate' (1961). His disclosure to the king of what he must suffer is a fair description of Lear's physical torments on the heath:

POVERTY Where that ye were pomped with what that ye wolde,
 Nowe must ye suffre bothe hunger and colde.
 With curteyns of sylke ye were wonte to be drawe,
 Noww must ye lerne to ly on the strawe.
 Your skyne that was wrapped in shertes of Raynes,
 Nowe must ye be stormy beten with showres and raynes. (2012–17)

Magnyfycence must also suffer ingratitude, reproaching the courtier-like vices who have taken his power and wealth: 'I was your mayster, though ye thynke it skorne, | And now on me ye gaure and sporne' (2246–7). Like Lear at the hands of his daughters and Oswald, Magnyfycence suffers the reproaches and insults of his own servants, and like Gloucester he is tempted to suicide. Magnyfycence, like Lear after the temporary victory of Cordelia's forces, is finally restored to his royal raiment and dignity. If Shakespeare's play had ended after the fourth act and evaded its tragic conclusion (as it was to do under Nahum Tate's auspices in the eighteenth century), the two plays would bear a striking narrative similarity.

But there is a specific type of morality, the Summons of Death, that I believe bears the most striking and purposeful relation to *King Lear*, but which again

cannot be enlisted precisely as source. *The Pride of Life*, a fragment from the early fifteenth century, is the earliest surviving English morality; extant only in manuscript, it is highly improbable that Shakespeare could have known it at all. But its surviving first scene bears a striking resemblance to the pattern of the opening of *King Lear*. The King of Life, at the height of his fortune and boasting of his power, is flattered by two of his knights, denominated Strength and Health. But his queen is disturbed by this and, refusing to flatter him, reminds him that he is mortal. The King is angered by this and insults her by suggesting that she wishes him dead so she can marry again. But she is steadfast in her insistence that human mortality must be kept in mind:

This world is bot ffantasye
and fful of trechurye;
gode sire, for your curteysye,
take this for no ffolye.

Ffor god [wot] wel the sothe,
I sey hit for no fabil;
Deth wol smyte to the;
in ffeith, loke thou be stabil.¹⁴

Rejecting her warning, the King turns again to his two knights for more flattery and reassurance. The queen sends to the bishop, who is found lamenting the state of the world under the King of Life: truth is gone, love is lechery, men are blind, the rich wrong the poor. He comes to preach to the King, but the latter interrupts and says he will hear no talk of death. 'Bishop babbler' is sent off as peremptorily as Kent, and the King sends out a messenger to challenge Death. The fragment ends at this point, but the prologue indicates that Death does come for the King, fells him, and that fiends carry off his soul until the Virgin intervenes.

While the apparent focus of the first scene of *King Lear* is love, not mortality, the dramatic pattern is interestingly similar: an imperious king, two characters' flattery and one's truth, the advice of the counselor rejected, and the counselor banished. Paradoxically, Lear himself mentions mortality, saying (in the Folio version of the play) that he wishes to confer his powers on younger strengths that he may 'Unburthen'd crawl toward death' (1.1.41). We quickly realize, however, that Lear is not at all ready to relinquish power, not

¹⁴ *Tudor Interludes*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 52, lines 231–8.

at all ready to accept the necessity of dying. His susceptibility to flattery and blindness to the concerns of those who actually love him make him as unaware of the realities around him as the King in the morality. There is of course great distance between the representational simplicity of the morality and the psychological and moral depths of *King Lear*, but both plays represent a man unprepared for death.

Fascinatingly, Freud's 1913 essay, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', intuited the presence of death in the scene.¹⁵ Attempting to account for the mythic and fairytale-like choice among three, he shrewdly noted that the apparent choice in various versions of the hero's choosing is only superficially a choice: if the third casket/goddess/woman/daughter is not chosen, disaster ensues. He sees Cordelia's comparative silence, her 'Nothing' in relation to the extravagant expressions of Goneril and Regan, as somehow suggestive of Lear's coming death, fulfilled when Lear enters in the final scene with Cordelia dead and himself about to die. The specifics of Freud's argument are not notably persuasive or compelling; he in fact must strain a good deal to make Cordelia stand for death in a rather too literal way. But Cordelia's association with death at the end of the play, her death precipitating Lear's, connects significantly with Freud's suggestion that the association of her truth against her sisters' flattery is a reminder of mortality. To find a similar meaning in the structural pattern of the fragmentary morality may seem oddly to confirm Freud's intuition, coming as it does from an entirely different historical and cultural context.

The Summons of Death morality is a type that must have been relatively common in view both of the threat of death in the recurrences of plague after the mid-fourteenth century and of the popularity of handbooks on preparation for death. But there is, paradoxically, only one other extant representative of this type in English, *Everyman*, and it a translation from Dutch. The Reformation is the likely reason for what I take to be the almost total disappearance of the Summons of Death morality, since the preparation for death involved multiple acts and rites that were sites of religious contestation in the sixteenth century: auricular confession, the emphasis on merit for the deliverance from purgatory, the hope of prayers and masses for the dead, and the final reception of the sacrament at the hands of a priest, all of which are stressed in *Everyman*. In this, the Summons of Death resembles the situation with late

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets', in *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. Ernest Jones and James Strachey, 5 vols (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 4:244–56.

medieval saints' plays, which are represented by only two extant English examples, though they are numerous in the French and Italian traditions. Even *Everyman*, which was printed at least four times in the early sixteenth century, survives *in toto* only in unique copies of two of the editions; since it was not reprinted for 240 years (in Thomas Hawkins's *The Origin of the English Drama* in 1773), even its survival has something of the fortuitous about it. If more plays of the caliber of *Everyman* survived, Shakespeare's reasons for evoking aspects of the Summons of Death plays would be more evident.

Still, without suggesting that *Everyman* is in any direct way a source of the tragedy, I want to compare what I take to be certain narrative stages of the tragedy in relation to *Everyman*. Some of this relationship is ironic, and of course the dramatic modes are very different; to see the possibility of relationship, moments of *King Lear* need to be transmuted to allegory, which of course does some violence to their subtlety. But the polarizing character of the play that I remarked earlier seems to contribute to a sense of the allegorical lying beneath the surface. *Everyman* first appeals to Fellowship for support on his journey. If Kent can be seen as Lear's Fellowship, then Lear's banishment of him is an ironic reversal of the morality pattern. But as Lear is turned away from Gloucester's castle by his two daughters, the analogue to *Everyman*'s desertion by Kindred and Cousin is more direct. Like Lear on the heath, *Everyman* has two companions to begin his journey, Good Deeds and Knowledge. Lear's Knowledge comes first in the Fool, then in Edgar's feigned madman, Poor Tom. If the disguised Kent follows Lear for past benefits and love, then there may be a certain fittingness in his becoming the narrative analogue of Good Deeds. Kent's final words seem to indicate that he will follow Lear into death, as Good Deeds follows *Everyman*. There is, I should admit, some forcing of the analogies here; the point is simply that Lear, like the morality protagonist, undergoes a process of testing and clarification.

Perhaps the most moving scene in *King Lear*, Lear's reunion with Cordelia after his trials on the heath, has a striking analogue not only with *Everyman* but with a number of other moralities. In the previous scene Lear enters mad and adorned with wild flowers; a sort of natural man stripped of the sophistication of society, he sees with frightening clarity the human condition and knows finally that his hand smells of mortality. In the next scene Cordelia has caused him to be clothed in 'fresh garments' (4.7.21). When he awakes, he wonders if he has not died and Cordelia is not a spirit. When she kneels to him to ask his benediction, Lear himself kneels; he will accept no homage and movingly confesses his own state:

LEAR Pray do not mock me.
 I am a very foolish, fond old man,
 Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
 And to deal plainly,
 I fear I am not in my perfect mind.(4.7.58–62)

As he recognizes Cordelia, and perhaps Kent, all his bitterness seems gone. The scene is moving because of the words of the penitent, still half-mad old man, imperfectly remembering and not knowing how he came to be where he is, but his rage abated and his suffering seemingly over. Still recognizable in the scene is Everyman kneeling in prayer before Knowledge and receiving, as she says, a new garment 'wette with your teres' (639). In Skelton's play the king takes a garment of penitence from Redress (2405). In *Hyckescorner* repentant Freewill receives such a garment from Contemplation (865–80). In the *Enterlude of Youth* Youth is given a 'new araye' by Charity (759–61). How purposeful is Shakespeare's apparent evocation of the morality motif here? The motif was a climactic moment in the moralities and memorable for that. Lear's own reference to his imagined purgatorial state—'Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound | Upon a wheel of fire that mine own tears | Do scald like molten lead' (4.7.45–7)—suggests that he sees himself at just such a moment of suffering contrition. Lear's sorrow and newly acquired patience and humility make the evocation of the repentant morality hero at this point strangely appropriate.

In *Everyman*, unlike the other surviving moralities that employ the motif, the reception of the garment of penitence is not the conclusion; a third of the play remains, and the act of dying must be represented with a striking clarity. One by one Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five-Wits fail Everyman, and he cries out that all have forsaken him. But Good Deeds tells him that he will stand by him and will support him even after Knowledge has departed, accompanying him even with the angel of Death. The vision of death is not tragic of course, formed as it is by a sense of spiritual continuance, and it does not attain, or aspire to, the pathos set by the stage direction, 'Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms' (5.3). Lear's frantic attempt to find life in Cordelia and his unanswerable question, 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, | And thou no breath at all?' are a vision of death very different from what the Summons of Death tradition evoked (5.3.307–8). Whatever it is that, in the Folio version, Lear believes he sees on Cordelia's lips just as he dies, he looks unblinkingly for a time at the stark physical fact of death itself. And yet the conclusion of *Everyman* attempts to do no less; the difference lies in its non-tragic appreciation of death. In terms

of dramatic structure, *King Lear* (minus the subplot) and *Everyman* move in a similar direction: from ignorance to knowledge, from penitence and reconciliation, to the vision of death in the final scene.

In comparing what I suggest are some broad similarities of narrative between *King Lear* and the only surviving complete Summons of Death morality, I have simplified things for myself by laying aside the subplot of the Gloucester family. But in doing so, I do not want to imply its irrelevance to the question of morality traditions in the play. Mack suggested that Edgar's experiences that lead him to the wisdom of his final four lines, Gloucester's being forsaken by all but one guide, and his temptation to suicide all spring from morality traditions.¹⁶ Gloucester's blindness is the literal equivalent of what had always been figuratively true in the moralities, and as he himself notes—'I stumbled when I saw' (4.1.19)—the figurative blindness falls away before the physical. In the meeting of Lear and Gloucester on the heath in Act 4, scene 6, there occurs a strange analogue of a moment in *Everyman*. When Everyman first meets Good Deeds, the latter tries to show him the account of his good works. Everyman, still unable to receive the benefit of his merit because of his sinful state, says, 'Our Lorde Jesus helpe me! | For one letter here I cannot se' (506–7). 'There is a blynde rekenyng in type of dystres,' Good Deeds replies. When Lear madly taunts Gloucester for his blindness, he pretends to offer a challenge for him to read. 'Were all thy letters suns, I could not see,' Gloucester replies (4.6.140). The exchange introduces Lear's hard-won realizations about authority and justice, how a man need not see literally to see feelingly. When Lear finally comes to recognize Gloucester, he momentarily forgets his own plight and commiserates Gloucester's. 'I will preach to thee. Mark' (4.6.180), says Lear, and in doing so he takes the part of Patience or Adversity instructing the morality hero. In the pathos of the scene we see something of what might be understood as Shakespeare's transvaluation of the morality motif. By his suffering and the madness that has led to insight, Lear has earned the role of Patience preaching to the Blind Humanity of his old companion. Edgar's asides indicate how heart-rending this new staging of the old morality has become: 'I would not take this from report: it is | And my heart breaks at it' (4.6.141–2). Edgar is tempted by platitudes and certainties, but here he sees that if the old values are being proven, they are proven by suffering flesh and blood. The evident imperfection of patience yet to be

¹⁶ Mack, *King Lear in Our Time*, 59–61.

seen in Lear only intensifies the pathos of his 'preaching'. For Lear the meeting with Cordelia remains.

This scene, Act 4, scene 6, may in fact provide a paradigm of the way the morality tradition finally appears to operate in the tragedy. It begins with Edgar's staging of a morality lesson to cure his father's despair, the supposed leap from Dover cliff and his 'miraculous' survival. Edgar characterizes Gloucester's despair as a 'fiend':

EDGAR As I stood here below methought his eyes
 Were two full moons, he had a thousand noses,
 Horns welk'd and waved like the [enridged] sea.
 It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father,
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors
 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee. (4.6.69–74)

Despite its superstition, a superstition that may verge on the comic, this bears the same relation to the psychic truth that Edgar's feigning to be pursued by 'the foul fiend' had on the heath: Gloucester was accompanied by the fiend Despair as Edgar had been accompanied by a Despair induced by Edmund. Nevertheless, the unreality of Edgar's staged morality induces, I would suggest, some discomfort in the audience about Gloucester's being persuaded of his salvation from despair. Edgar's concluding admonition, 'Bear free and patient thoughts' (4.6.80), may seem to come too easily. But the entrances still come pat: Edgar's words are followed by the stage direction, 'Enter Lear mad.' This second lesson is what makes the stager of the first cry out that he would not take what he sees from report: its reality breaks his heart. Edgar in effect must learn the lesson that he had presumed to teach. When in Act 5 Gloucester's despair returns, Edgar again reminds his father of the need to avoid despair, but while not revoking the meaning he assigned to the feigned miracle, he now expresses it not in the imperative, but more in terms of Lear's heart-rending 'preaching' on patience: 'Men must endure | Their going hence, even as their coming hither; | Ripeness is all' (4.2.9–11). Lear's curiously anachronistic relationship to Edgar, which we learn of from Regan in Act 2 (2.1.91–2), is as his godfather. The effect of Edgar's role on the heath was an ironic reversal of this relationship, as Poor Tom instructed the mad king. But now Lear's appearance as Patience or Suffering Adversity in a role not feigned reestablishes his position as Edgar's guide and makes of the anachronism something rich and strange. What Edgar must learn in the tragedy—and expresses in his final four lines—he learns from his godfather.

In the subplot centered on the Gloucester family, the moral issues of the play appear simplified, at least to the characters, who understand a sort of retributive justice at work. Gloucester's entrance on the heath in Act 3, scene 4, is a 'pat' entrance that even seems rather comic in its literalism. The Fool, trying to restrain Lear from taking off his clothes in the cold night, says, 'Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart, a small spark, all the rest on 's body cold. Look here comes a walking fire' (3.4.111–14)—and the old lecher Gloucester enters with a torch. As Edmund lies dying, Edgar reveals himself to his brother and says of their dead father: 'The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices | Make instruments to plague us: | The dark and vicious place where thee he got | Cost him his eyes' (5.3.171–4). While the play as a whole does not sustain this confidence, Edgar sees a sort of justice in Gloucester's blinding in relation to the adultery that begot the son complicit in that blinding. The corrupt Edmund dies at the hand of the brother whom he has tricked and plotted against. Though Gloucester dies, he dies reconciled to Edgar, who says that his weak heart 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, | Burst smilingly' (4.3.199–200). And of course Edgar survives. Overall a kind of rigid justice might seem to pervade this portion of the tragedy. And the meanings that Edgar and Gloucester attach to things appear closer to the ideologies of justice that characterize at least some of the morality plays.

By contrast the Lear story always exceeds distributive justice. Cordelia's truth-telling results in her banishment, as does Kent's attempt to counsel Lear. Lear's curse of Goneril (1.4.296–310) exceeds her provocation of him. Cast out by his daughters on the heath in a storm, he asserts, and an audience presumably agrees, he is 'a man | More sinn'd against than sinning' (3.2.59–60). And while the evil sisters die, Cordelia's death of course shocks our sense of justice, in both a literary and moral sense. What I hope to have shown is that the morality tradition pervades the Lear story as much as that of the Gloucester family. The role of the Summons of Death tradition, I believe, is to tie the Lear story to a narrative about the acquisition of self-knowledge and wisdom that have always been thought requisite before the coming of death. If death is in some sense implicit in the first scene, not only in Lear's expressed, if insincere, desire to 'Unburdened crawl toward death' but in Cordelia's refusal to flatter and her reminder of the succession of generations in her assertion that she will transfer love and duty from a father to a husband in the explanation of her 'Nothing,' one might object that Lear's acquisition of wisdom—his clear-sighted vision of humanity, appetite, excess, authority, and the tragic charac-

ter of human life itself ('Thou knowest the first time that we smell the air, | We wawl and cry . . . that we are come | To this great stage of fools')—as well as his own self-knowledge become futile in view of his immediate death. But this is to ignore the traditional—and not only Christian—sense that death is best approached through an apprehension of what life is. After the first scene Lear undergoes a painful and complex process in which he acquires knowledge of his own foolishness in giving away his kingship and banishing those most loyal to him, then more deeply on the heath in understanding the fragility of human life, and finally, with Gloucester, in the arbitrary character of human authority. The play of course transmutes the allegorical character of the morality tradition into intensely expressed scenes of psychic suffering, but in such a way that an audience that knew the morality traditions would still see that structure beneath the realism of its representation.

Shakespeare's tragedy obviously exceeds the bounds and capabilities of the morality tradition. The conclusion of the Summons of Death was the death of the protagonist, symbolically and theologically expressed. *King Lear* requires us to witness the old king's death both as suffering and as release, but unmediated by any explicit theological understanding. But in one of those fascinating and strangely ambiguous moves intermittent in late Shakespeare, he invests characters and moments in a sort of quasi-sacral character that both puzzle and lend a sort of openness to the way we understand those elements. He uses, for example, theologically charged terms in the words the gentleman sent to apprehend Lear speaks of Cordelia: 'Thou hast one daughter | Who redeems nature from the general curse | Which twain have brought her to' (4.6.205–7). Where an earlier criticism might have spoken of Cordelia as a 'Christ figure', we instead might speak of a transmutation of explicit religious tradition into patterns stripped of any but mythic association. Cordelia does not die *for* Lear. But in his carrying her dead body onto the stage, some in the audience might have seen a sort of strange pietà, one that invoked the pathos of the familiar scene of parent and dead child, but without theological content. Who can say what the effect of this may have been on Jacobean viewers, still not far removed from the culture of the fifteenth century but troubled by a subsequent century of religious turmoil? If I'm right about the relevance of the morality tradition and the Summons of Death to *King Lear*, Shakespeare went to some lengths to evoke that earlier culture at the same time that he was presenting the onset of death in a starkly immediate way. Lear dies seeing something on Cordelia's lips, deluded *we* assume, and he dies in a way that draws us far beyond the symbolic

representational modes of the morality play. The tragedy's vast power seems to spring from both its seizure on the Summons of Death and its transmutation of that tradition until it confronts death in a way devoid of the ideology that supported the tradition. If we feel from the opening scene that death will inevitably come to Lear, we still do not foresee the starkly realistic emotional circumstances in which it arrives.

Shakespeare's use of earlier drama, I would conclude, is a complex process of appropriation and winnowing, in which, bricoleur-like, he picks and chooses among the traditions available. It's significant that those traditions we call medieval come to interest him more and more in the latter part of his dramatic career; besides *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, one thinks, for example, of *Pericles*, where the tradition is narrative rather than dramatic. No doubt his awareness and interest in these traditions is linked in part to his habitual self-reflexivity that leads to a further interest in what one might call theatrical modes or textures. He invokes these earlier dramatic modes to give a certain power and clarity to the unfolding of the ideational structures of the plays. What he accomplishes in a play like *King Lear* is a multidimensionality that creates an emotional immediacy and at the same time gives a sense that the narrative moments are stretching out to larger meanings. But what is equally striking about his invocation of these traditions is his confidence that an audience will follow and understand them. By the middle of the first decade of the seventeenth century the Corpus Christi theater had not been seen for over 25 years, and the morality interludes must have seemed equally part of an earlier tradition. But Shakespeare assumes that audiences share something of his own early knowledge of these traditions, that an audience can collaborate with him in drawing meaning from them. It's a confidence that should make us wary of imposing too quickly our boundaries of 'early modern' and 'late medieval' on theaters that were in fact adjacent.

Marvels and Counterfeits

False Resurrections in the Chester *Antichrist* and *1 Henry IV*

Karen Sawyer Marsalek

The image of a character returning from the dead was a potent and enduring one in early English drama, partly because of the inherent dramatic power of the character's reappearance, and partly because the image had a long theatrical history in biblical drama. From the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, plays dedicated to Christ's resurrection were a central feature of the English theatrical landscape.¹ Their dramaturgy and its connotations of community-building extended to other plays as well. Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists who appropriated the motif of Christ's resurrection often used its iconographic and linguistic elements to underscore themes of reunion, forgiveness, and restoration; Shakespeare's work in *The Winter's Tale* is a good example.² However, other resurrection moments in early English drama are darker and more

¹ For the tradition of resurrection drama in parishes, cathedrals, schools, and cities across England, see Alexandra F. Johnston, 'The Emerging Pattern of the Easter Play in England', *Medieval English Theatre* 20 (1998), 3–23.

² I consider the final scene of *The Winter's Tale* in light of the context established by Alexandra F. Johnston in '“Awake your faith”: English Resurrection Drama and *The Winter's Tale*', in *Bring Furth the Pagants': Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston*, ed. David N. Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007), 271–91. Sarah Beckwith analyzes the theological significance of Shakespeare's resurrections elsewhere in the present volume, pp. 45–67.

ambivalent. Parodic, distorted, and even demonic, these versions are what I call false resurrections, and the examples I shall consider are enacted and produced by characters linked to the Antichrist tradition. In the provincial civic drama of the Chester *Coming of Antichrist*, performed periodically from the late fifteenth century until at least 1572, and in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, first printed in 1598, Antichrist figures both rise from the dead and raise others.³ While versions of Christ's resurrection signal communal healing and renewal, the deceit and manipulation of bodies in these false resurrections indicate usurpation of power and abuse of the body politic. As the plays reveal these 'miracles' to be illusions, they stage cultural unease about the uses and hazards of performance. This unease initially created a productive tension for the Chester Antichrist play, but changing constructions of Antichrist and concomitant burgeoning antitheatricality led to an interpretative instability that late-sixteenth-century religiopolitical authorities could not allow. The ideological competitions enacted *within* the world of that play and *through* that play's production or censorship provide useful context for thinking about Shakespeare's work in *1 Henry IV*. The false resurrection of his Antichrist figure, Falstaff, shows us Shakespeare's dual deployment of both theatrical tradition and the Antichrist elements in the conflicted Oldcastle myth to defend the playhouse's admittedly ambiguous art. In so doing, Shakespeare does not gloss over theater's power to mislead, but instead places the onus on the interpretative faculties of the viewer.

Richard K. Emmerson provides a clear account of two constructions of Antichrist circulating in medieval and early modern England.⁴ Both drew on biblical apocalyptic prophecies of a false messiah, and these references had been elaborated on by early theologians until the figure of Antichrist acquired

Other critics have focused primarily on the resurrection episodes from the so-called mystery cycles; see Cynthia Marshall, 'Appendix B: *The Winter's Tale* and the Corpus Christi Resurrection Plays', in *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1991), 122–9, and Darryll Grantley, '*The Winter's Tale* and Early Religious Drama', *Comparative Drama* 20 (1986), 17–37. Elizabeth Williamson has considered a wider range of resurrection moments in early modern drama in 'Staging Sacred Things: The Circulation of Religious Objects in Seventeenth-Century Drama', Dissertation, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2005.

³ Play 23 in R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, eds, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol. 1, EETS ss 3 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), 408–38, Appendix 1B 491–516. Subsequent quotations from the Chester Plays will be identified by play and line number.

⁴ Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1981), 74–107, 211–21.

substantial legendary accretions.⁵ In this legend, which persisted in the Catholic tradition, Antichrist will be a single tyrant who will declare himself the messiah and win the worship of the world's rulers through false doctrine, marvelous works, and bribes. The marvelous works include raising the dead and Antichrist's own resurrection. When the Old Testament prophets Enoch and Elijah return from Limbo to preach against him, Antichrist will kill them. He will be destroyed in turn by the Archangel Michael and cast into hell, while Enoch and Elijah will be resurrected and taken to heaven. Opposed to this tradition of the Antichrist as an individual yet to appear were the views of Lollards, who identified the whole contemporary ecclesiastical hierarchy as Antichrist.⁶ Their understanding was also adopted in reformist rhetoric, which constructed the Pope and his followers, a corporate and ongoing threat to the 'true' church, as Antichrist, and rejected the legendary 'life of Antichrist'. As Bishop John Jewel wrote in his *Exposition upon the Two Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, attempts at such biography were as deceptive as Antichrist himself: 'These tales haue bene craftily deuised to beguile our eyes, that whilest we thinke upon these gesses, and so occupy our selues in beholding a shadow or probable coniecture of Antichrist, he which is Antichrist indeede may unawares deceiue us.'⁷ Even though Jewel is speaking of *narratives* of Antichrist, his imagery demonstrates just how inseparable the figure was from threats of visual duplicity and manipulation, dangers also posed by the theater.

Miracles or Marvels: Antichrist in the Chester Cycle

The Chester *Coming of Antichrist* dramatizes the Catholic legend outlined above, and is the only English play on the subject. The longest play in

⁵ In addition to Revelations 11, 13, and 20:1–10, biblical sources for the Antichrist figure include verses, in the synoptic gospels and several epistles; see for example the parallel passages in Matthew 24:1–24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, as well as 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, 1 John 2:18–23 and 4:3, and 2 John 1:7. Emmerson notes that the most influential version of the Antichrist legend is probably the *Libellus de Antichristo*, written by tenth-century monk Adso of Montier-en-Der; see Emmerson, *Antichrist*, 76–7. For a sixteenth-century version of the legend, see Wynken de Worde's *The Byrthe and Lyfe of the Moost False and Deceytfull Antechryst* (London, 1525[?]; STC 670).

⁶ For examples in Wycliffe's writing and later Lollard tracts, see Emmerson, *Antichrist*, 71–2.

⁷ John Jewel, *An Exposition upon the two Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul to the Thessalonians* (London: R. Newberie and H. Bynneman, 1583), 282 (STC 14603).

the Chester cycle, it survives both independently in a manuscript usually dated to the late fifteenth century and in five full cycle manuscripts that postdate the last performance of the cycle by at least fourteen years.⁸ Few substantial differences distinguish these six witnesses to the text, though other records suggest extensive revisions were made, or at least planned. The cyclic context contributes significantly to the play's interrogation of dangerous theatricality, for Antichrist's compelling performance coexists with audience memory of the divine figure he is imitating, creating a kind of double vision for spectators.⁹ It is perhaps appropriate that the play was performed by the guild of Dyers and Hewsters, experts in altering hue, or appearance.

In his entrance, Antichrist takes advantage of audience expectation to position himself as Christ. In the previous play, prophets summarize elements of his Antichrist legend as well as signs of Doomsday, culminating with the hope that God will give the audience grace to 'come to the blysse that lasteth aye' (22.337). For an audience not equipped with cast lists and speech headings, the prophets' final line, 'Hee comes! Soone you shall see!' (22.340) could easily signal Christ's descent for the Last Judgment. Instead, Antichrist enters. He introduces himself first in Latin, as the Father and Son have done in plays 1, 2, 13, 20, and in English proclaims himself to be the Christ, taking twenty-four lines before he distinguishes himself from the historical (and in his view, troublesome) Jesus. As David Mills notes, the audience is deceived, just as the four kings representing the world's rulers soon will be.¹⁰ The character's danger to the social body is already clear, not only within the world of the play, but also without.

The cyclic context works to Antichrist's advantage again as he appears to surpass Christ's accomplishments in raising the dead. Though Antichrist

⁸ Lumiansky and Mills, eds, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, ix.

⁹ Comparing the theatrical aesthetics in the Chester *Coming of Antichrist* and Digby *Play of Mary Magdalene*, Theresa Coletti argues that the mimesis of Christ's life in the latter play is 'more complicated' and 'serious' because it incorporates the character of Christ and episodes from his life into the portrayal of Mary Magdalene's *vita*. She acknowledges that Antichrist parodies Christ's actions, but perhaps undervalues the way that the cycle performance would encapsulate this parody in the mimesis of Christ's life; indeed, through the conventions of processional staging, Christ's resurrection could be happening in one part of the city at the same time that Antichrist's resurrection was happening elsewhere. See Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 195.

¹⁰ David Mills, 'The "Now" of "Then"', *Medieval English Theatre* 22 (2000), 9.

performs other apparent miracles, such as turning trees upside down and orchestrating a fraudulent Pentecost, his false resurrections are most important to the play; they are the performances that both win the kings' allegiance and ultimately cause his downfall. In Play 13, audiences had already seen Christ raising a single man, Lazarus, and heard the testimony, 'By *verey signe* nowe men maye see | that thou arte Godes Sonne' (13.476–7, emphasis mine).¹¹ Antichrist echoes these words in his offer of a doubly impressive miracle—he will bring *two* corpses back to life:

ANTECHRISTE That I am Christ and Christ wilbe
 by *verey signe* soone shall you see,
 for dead men through my postee
 shall ryse from death to liffe. (23.77–80, emphasis mine)

This 'postee', or power, would eclipse that of Jesus, who shares power with his Father and the Spirit, and prays to his Father before commanding Lazarus to come forth (13.442–9). In contrast, Antichrist takes sole credit for his marvelous acts of resurrection and deliberately uses them as a bargaining chip:

ANTECHRISTE Yf I may doe this marveyulouslye,
 I read you on me leeve.
 Men buried in grave you may see.
 What maistrye ys nowe, hope yee,
 to rayse them up throwe my postye
 and all through my owne accorde?
 Whether I in my godhead bee
 by *verey signe* you shall see.
 Ryse up, dead men, and honour me
 and knowe me for your lord. (23.95–104)

These repeated offers of a '*verey signe*' of '*maistrye*', '*godhead*', and '*postye*' unshared with any other person of the Trinity ('all through my owne accorde') are fulfilled when the dead men do come forth from their tombs: 'Tunc resurgent mortui de sepulchris' (23.104SD). As I shall demonstrate below, his adjective '*marveyulouslye*' might trigger some suspicion about the feat, but assuming that the resurrection is staged in a convincing manner, the accomplishment

¹¹ From 1531 the cycle was presented over three days in Whitsun week, and the *Raising of Lazarus* would have been performed on the day before the *Coming of Antichrist*.

suggests to spectators as well as the kings onstage that Antichrist deserves veneration.¹²

Antichrist's displays of power continue in his own resurrection, but here audience memory of Christ's resurrection just a few plays earlier provides a less supportive framework; it primes the spectators to distinguish Antichrist's marvelous performance from Christ's messianic power, even if the four kings cannot. In their responses to Antichrist's death, the kings resemble Christ's followers after his Crucifixion. Like Joseph of Arimathea, who mourned, 'A, sweete Jesu, sweete Jesu' as he removed Christ from the cross (16A.440), Tertius Rex calls Antichrist 'this sweete' as he prepares to bury him (23.142). Secundus Rex hopes that Antichrist may 'save' them 'from disease' (23.141), echoing Maria Jacobi's lament for Christ as 'my helpe, my heale' (18.318). But these expressions of mourning are framed and undercut by Antichrist's elaborate stage-management of his own resurrection for maximum public effect. He grandstands, Bottom-like, both at his death and at his emergence from the tomb: 'I dye, I dye! Nowe am I dead! . . . I ryse! Nowe reverence dose to mee' (23.133, 165).¹³ Though the kings are convinced by this display, spectators could recognize it as a one-man show, notably unsupported by divine or natural wonders. The stage direction, 'Tunc Antechristus levat corpus suum

¹² Staging these resurrections in a more comic manner can help the audience quickly recognize the fraudulence of Antichrist's miracles, though perhaps at the expense of the character's persuasive power and accompanying moral threat. The early theater company at the University of Toronto, Poculi Ludique Societas, has recently staged two different free-standing productions of the Chester play, the first directed by Scott Moore, and the second by Peter Cockett, and in both cases this resurrection was played for laughs, making the kings appear more gullible and 'remov[ing] ambivalence from the signifying process'. In the first production, 'the dead were dressed as comical Egyptian mummies, one of which lost a detachable arm in an extended dance sequence'; in the second the dead men 'were so decrepit that they could barely walk and spoke in creaky "horror movie" voices'; see Peter Cockett, 'Staging *Antichrist* and the Performance of Miracles', in *Spectacle and Public Performance in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Robert Stillman (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2006), 31–50, esp. 33, 36, and 45. Stagings of the full cycle can lend the play a different impact in the context of Christ's resurrections.

¹³ I also suspect a punning allusion to the play's performers, the Dyers and Hewsters, in the melodramatic cry, 'I dye, I dye!'. Such a joke would further undercut the drama of Antichrist's death and multiply the levels of 'performance' going on in the scene. Kathleen Barker has recently offered a provocative analysis of Bottom's debts to the Antichrist figure, suggesting that Shakespeare's interest in this dramatic tradition may extend beyond the links I trace in this paper; Kathleen Barker, 'Antichrist and the Anxiety of Representation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', paper presented at the Shakespeare Association of America, Dallas, Texas, April 2008.

surgens a mortuis,' suggests none of the typical theatrical accompaniments to Christ's resurrection: noise of thunder, a bright light that terrifies the soldiers guarding the tomb (usually achieved in performance with rosin or gunpowder), or angelic testimony. The Chester *Resurrection*, for example, involves two angels, who sing 'Christus resurgens a mortuis,' and the guards who awaken after Christ's exit exclaim repeatedly about blinding light and shaking in fear (18.153SD, 187–9, 209–11, 272). Poor Antichrist must create his own bombastic thunder, proclaim his own resurrection, and even cue the proper response of 'reverence' from the kings (23.165). Insistent showmanship substitutes for the supernatural authority and mystery of Christ's resurrection moment. Leslie H. Martin has argued that this 'ludicrous and anticlimactic' performance creates a comic eschatology for the Chester cycle.¹⁴ Certainly Antichrist's narration of his death and resurrection sound more comic than the lines that accompany his earlier feats. However, if the audience has been taken in during Antichrist's first speech, and marveled, even despite themselves, at the raising of two men, their position of superiority is compromised. If they can see 'the man behind the curtain' at this point, they can also attest to the power of his illusions, a power still enthralling the kings onstage.

I have called attention to the independent power Antichrist claims because it is crucial to the ontological status he wants for his resurrections. Though he first accomplishes them 'marveylouslye' (95), he later defends his authority to the prophets 'Enock' and 'Elias' by citing his 'myracles and marveyles' (406). However, Elias quickly contradicts him: 'The were no myracles but mervelles thinges | that thou shewed unto these kinges | through the fyendes crafte' (410–12). While Antichrist elides the miraculous with the marvellous, Elias invokes a common medieval distinction; Gareth Roberts observes that 'demonological works often quote the tag *Mira non miracula* (wonders, not miracles),' and both Augustine and Aquinas provided influential arguments for the difference.¹⁵ Marvels relied

¹⁴ Leslie H. Martin, 'Comic Eschatology in the Chester *Coming of Antichrist*', *Comparative Drama* 5 (1971), 165.

¹⁵ Gareth Roberts, "'An art lawful as eating'? Magic in *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*", in *Shakespeare's Late Plays*, ed. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1999), 138–9. For example, Augustine contrasts 'wonders, which seem to be divinely told or accomplished' but which are actually 'mockeries and temptations set as traps for us by malign demons' with 'miracles that God accomplishes through angels or other means'. See Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 410. See also the Aquinas references in the following notes.

on illusion to deceive human senses, but the demons or magicians who performed them still worked within the natural laws of God's creation. As Caroline Walker Bynum explains, marvels, or *mirabilia*, were 'natural effects we fail to understand', whereas miracles, or *miracula* were "'unusual and difficult" (*insolitum et arduum*) events, "produced by God's power alone on things that have a natural tendency to the opposite effect."¹⁶ Resurrection from the dead was one such miraculous phenomenon. By insisting on his sole responsibility for his works, Antichrist argues that *his* power alone has reversed the natural process of death; that his resurrections are divine miracles, rather than demonically-assisted deceptions of human senses.

However, both the truth of the prophet's distinction and the illusory nature of the resurrections are quickly proved. Enock asks ironically to see these 'miracles' (537), requesting that the risen men consume a meal: 'Yf thou bee so micle of might | to make them eate and drynke, | for verey God we will thee knowe' (547–9). Again, the cycle's true resurrections can prepare the audience for such a request. The restored Lazarus reappears in Play 14, dining at the home of Simon the Leper, and in Play 19 Christ demonstrates his true corporeal resurrection by eating 'rosted fyshe and honye' (19.194). Just before the stage direction 'Tunc comedit', Jesus explains, '[A] ghoooste to eate hath no powere, | as you shall see anon' (19.197–9). His words refer to the meal he is about to share with his disciples and also function as a prophecy, fulfilled in the Antichrist play when the supposedly risen men are unable to eat bread blessed by Elias. Indeed, neither can even look at it, and Primus Mortuus is frightened by its 'prynt'—the mark of the Cross, as on a host (579). Their bodies have been marvelously animated through witchcraft, not miraculously resurrected by divine power. Unable to tolerate either physical or spiritual sustenance, they are a woefully ineffectual—though superficially convincing—imitation of human life.

¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Wonder', *American Historical Review* 102 (1997), 4–5, quoting questio 6 art. 2 from Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, English Dominican Fathers, trans. (London, 1933), 2:162–4; and *De Potentia Dei* in *S. Thomas Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. Robert Busa (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1980), 3:232. Stuart Clark also discusses the distinction; see *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 165. In contrast, John Parker argues for conflation of the terms in medieval apologetics as part of his larger argument for the dependence of Christianity on playacting and hypocrisy; though his remarks on this conflation precede some discussion of the Chester play, he does not address the loaded exchange between Elias and Antichrist. See John Parker, *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 61–5, 72, 79–82.

The evidence of these dead men (and it is worth noting that their speech headings throughout the play are *Primus* and *Secundus Mortuus*) also exposes the horror underlying false resurrection at another's hands: the fear of invasion or penetration and manipulation. In this respect, the bodies of the dead men are a synecdoche for the body politic that Antichrist has begun to control through his performance. It is fitting, then, that his body is staged and manipulated in turn at the end of the play. Two demons physically divide his soul and body and carry them off (678SD); *Primus Demon* even operates the corpse like a gruesome puppet, turning the head for one last look at the audience: 'A, fellowe, a dole looke that thow deale | to all this fayre companye, hence or thou wend' (695–6).¹⁷ Antichrist's death earlier in the play was never subjected to scrutiny, but here it is impossible to avoid. Like the Wicked Witch of the East, he's 'not only merely dead, [he's] really most sincerely dead.' His manipulation of corpses, of the four kings, and of the Chester audience through 'miracles' has come to a grisly end.

The self-conscious theatricality of Antichrist's false resurrections may remind us that dramatizations of biblical stories or saints' lives were also 'miracles'; Antichrist's mimesis of episodes in Christ's life is a kind of miracle-playing.¹⁸ Through the Antichrist play, the cycle scrutinizes the potential perils of its own performative undertaking. Its condemnation of false miracles corroborates some of the criticisms of miracle-playing expressed in other works. As early as the fourteenth century, preacher Robert Mannyng had decried extra-liturgical performances of 'myracles' as 'a syght of synne' contributing to worldly pomp rather than heavenly glory. In particular, Mannyng argues against performances in 'weyys or greuys', that is, ways and graves—the streets and

¹⁷ Martin Walsh notes that the body is 'farcically manhandled' (perhaps one should say 'demon-handled?') but sees this treatment as emphasizing Antichrist's human vulnerability. See Martin Walsh, 'Demon or Deluded Messiah? The Characterization of Antichrist in the Chester Cycle', *Medieval English Theatre* 7:1 (1985), 22. Walsh's valuable reading, based like Cockett's on an experience of directing the play, emphasizes the different emotional facets of Antichrist's character. However, I feel that in discovering the role's complexity, he reduces some of its dangerous power.

¹⁸ MED 'miracle' 2b, 5. My reading of this term is consonant with that of many scholars of early drama. Lawrence M. Clopper argues, however, that medieval references to 'miracula' or 'miraculis' reference the Old Latin sense of 'monstrosity'; such terms thus refer not to devotional biblical drama, but to *ludi inhonesti* such as 'summer-games and other *ludi* held within sacred precincts'. See Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), 21.

churchyards where various kinds of plays and revelry took place.¹⁹ Antichrist's false resurrections, which contribute to his 'great renowne' (23:130), are literally performed in ways and graves, being staged in the streets of Chester, and with the props of sepulchers and a tomb. The performance also resembles those opposed by the anonymous Lollard authors of the *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, who argue that miracle-playing dangerously distracts attention from the true works of God.²⁰ Such performances are categorically unable to move the audience to true contrition and conversion, insist the authors. While Christ wrought 'effectual' and 'errest' miracles, those who 'usen in bourde and pleye the miraclis and werkis that Crist so ernystfully wroughte to oure helthe...errith in the byleve, reversith Crist, and scornynth God.'²¹ This list of behaviors could also stand as a summary of Antichrist's offenses in the Chester play—erring in belief, 'reversing' Christ, and scorning God.

Even within these texts, however, the antitheatrical criticism exists alongside explicit support for biblical drama, and these endorsements illuminate the objectives of the Chester play. The authors of the *Treatise of Miraclis*

¹⁹ Robert Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne's 'Handlyng Synne', A.D. 1303, with those Parts of the Anglo-French Treaties on which it was Founded*, William of Waddington's 'Manuel des Pechiez', ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 119, 123 (1901, 1903; rpt. New York: Kraus, 1973), 155. For example, the churchyard of Beverly Minster in the East Riding of Yorkshire was used as a performance space for a resurrection play sometime between 1188 and 1213. The performance was not part of the Easter season, and instead took place 'ut tempore quodam aestivo intra septa polyandri ecclesiae Beati Johannis, ex parte aquilonari' ('one summer, within the grave-yard of the church of the Blessed John, on the north side'). There, 'larvatorum (ut assolet) et verbis et actu fieret repraesentatio Dominicae resurrectionis' ('the resurrection of the Lord was presented by masked persons [as usual] in both words and action'). See Patricia Badir, 'Representations of the Resurrection at Beverly Minster circa 1208: Chronicle, Play, Miracle', *Theatre Survey* 38 (1997), 9–41. I quote from the account appended to this article, and from Diana Wyatt's accompanying translation. Other examples of churchyard drama contemporary with the Chester cycle are the Sherborne parish revivals of their Corpus Christi play between 1571 and 1576; see Rosalind Conklin Hays, C. E. McGee, Sally L. Joyce, and Evelyn S. Newlyn, eds, *Dorset and Cornwall*, REED (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999), 38, 267, 269, 270.

²⁰ The text is divided into two parts, and dialect differences suggest two authors as well. The *Treatise* appears alongside other Wycliffite writings in British Library MS Additional 24,202, and was probably composed between 1380 and 1425. See Cliford Davidson, ed., *A Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, EDAM Monograph 19 (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan Univ. Press, 1993), 1, 4, 32–3. Most scholars have treated this work as a discussion of biblical drama, but see Clopper's dissenting analysis in *Drama, Play, and Game*, 63–107.

²¹ Davidson, ed., *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, 93. In her edition of the text, Anne Hudson notes that 'miracle' here can mean the life of Christ, the miraculous events within that life, or a 'miracle play' about the life of Christ. See Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1997), 188 n 6.

Pleyinge lay out their arguments in response to proponents of drama, some of whom were members of their own community.²² These proponents are quoted as urging performance of an Antichrist play, and though the author dismisses the legitimacy of such a performance, his argument paradoxically provides some justification for staging that character's misleading illusions. He fumes, 'thes men that seyen, "Pley we a pley of Anticrist and of the Day of Dome that sum man may be convertid therby," fallen into the herisie of hem that, reversing the aposteyl, seiden, "Do we yvel thingis, that ther comyn gode thingis."²³ By 'yvel thingis' the *Treatise* author means performance itself, but we can also apply the sentiment to the strategy of bracketing Antichrist's false resurrections within the framework of the Chester cycle. While the Chester false resurrections exemplify misleading performances, or 'yvel thingis', they also point toward other 'gode thingis': cycle moments that dramatize sound miracles, such as Christ's Resurrection. Robert Mannyng had approved of church plays on that sacred subject, which could 'make men be yn beleuë gode | þat he ros with flesshe and blode.'²⁴ The juxtaposition of both kinds of resurrection implies that the theater of Antichrist is dangerous, not theater per se. Peter Travis has argued that the profane drama of the character is in fact a crucial means for redeeming the drama of the rest of the cycle. The defeat of Antichrist thus stands for the defeat of profane drama: 'what survives after this comic purgation is the dramatic world intact, purified by its self-profaneation, its identity and value as a "sign" now to be judged in context with that other surviving and more sacred sign, the sacrament of the eucharistic Host.'²⁵

²² As Nicholas Davis observes, the second author's attempts to confirm his friend in the antitheticalism of their mutual belief is 'one of the stronger pieces of evidence that some Lollards were prepared to look favourably on a popular, public religious drama'. See Nicholas Davis, 'Another View of the *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, rev. of *A Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. Davidson', *Medieval English Theatre* 4:1 (1982), 51. Remarks in a Wycliffite sermon about the York Pater Noster play also reveal some sympathy toward biblical drama, as Alexandra F. Johnston has noted in 'The Plays of the Religious Guilds of York: The Creed Play and the Pater Noster Play', *Speculum* 50 (1975), 71. Similar convergence is suggested by the 1518 will of William Pisford, mayor of Coventry in 1501, whose family was associated with the Lollard cause. Pisford left a gown and cloak to his guild 'to be kept to serve theym in their said paionde the tyme of the playes' and another gown to the Tanners 'to the same vse'. See R. W. Ingram, ed., *Coventry*, REED (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), 113, 576 n 247.

²³ Davidson, ed., *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, 101–2.

²⁴ Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne's 'Handlyng Symme'*, 155.

²⁵ Peter Travis, *Dramatic Design in the Chester Cycle* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), 240.

Travis' argument (and perhaps the very inclusion of the false performances of Antichrist within the cycle itself) assumes a certain fixity in the associations of Antichrist; he explains, 'Antichrist's art, [Chester audiences] knew, was evil; the playwright's art, they assumed, was good'.²⁶ Yet the changing identification of Antichrist in the sixteenth century could destabilize the audience's ability to make this distinction. Like most biblical dramas, the Chester plays were probably written by Catholic clerics. Could 'the playwright's art' still be considered good by those who recognized the Catholic clergy as Antichrist?²⁷ If a community can stage and contain the dangers of drama by identifying those dangers with Antichrist's fraudulent miracles, then it is vital that its members agree on who, or what, Antichrist is.

The documents of the Chester cycle reveal a city that made and remade its civic religious drama as its social, religious, and political contexts changed, a process that Mills has called 'recycling the cycle'.²⁸ Among the changes to the plays was an attempt to clarify the contested identity of Antichrist. The text as we have it presents a traditional version of the Antichrist legend, but a post-Reformation announcement of the cycle known as the Late Banns promises a new didactic element: a 'Doctor that godlye maye expownde | Whoe be Antechristes the worlde rownde aboute.' Furthermore, 'Enocke' and 'Helye' were to show how 'Christes worde . . . | Confowndethe all Antechristes and, sects of yat degree'.²⁹ As Emerson has argued, this announcement promotes a reformist understanding of Antichrist as a present-day multifarious threat, rather than a future individual. The Banns may have been read before the City Council in 1572 to promote a performance that faced significant opposition; annals for that year record that 'the

²⁶ Ibid. 226.

²⁷ In an important article, Emerson outlines the varying receptions that the play might have enjoyed, from the early Tudor period, when the traditional Catholic view of Antichrist predominated, to the Henrician era, when views of the Catholic Church as Antichrist became more widespread, to the Elizabethan settlement and the state-sanctioned flourishing of Protestant eschatology. Richard K. Emerson, 'Contextualizing Performance: The Reception of the Chester Antichrist', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29 (1999), 89–119.

²⁸ David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays*, SEED 4 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1998). Mills provides a penetrating account of the Chester plays from their origins to the present day, which is illuminated by his intimate knowledge of the city, of the civic documents related to the drama, and of the cycle manuscripts.

²⁹ See Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper, and David Mills, eds, *Cheshire Including Chester*, REED (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2007), 339.

whole Playes were playde thoughe manye of the Cittie were sore against the settinge forthe therof'.³⁰

However, crucial evidence from the letter-book of Christopher Goodman, one Puritan Cestrian 'sore against' the performance also suggests that the changes were not actually performed—that the Banns were a gesture to pacify the play's opponents.³¹ Goodman had written to Henry Hastings, the earl of Huntingdon, who was Lord President of the Council of the North, complaining of the upcoming performance, and although both the earl and Archbishop Grindal of York subsequently wrote to the Mayor and to the Bishop of Chester, ordering that the performance be suspended, the plays went on as scheduled nonetheless. The performance is justified in the annals by the claim that the 'Inhibition . . . sent from the Archbishop to stay them . . . Came too late'.³² Goodman's letter-book indicates, however, that he had delivered the letter before the production.³³ Writing to the Archbishop twice after the performance, Goodman sends 'notes of such absurdities as are truly collected out of their old originall, by the which your wisdoms may easily judge of the rest'. Though some corrections have been made, Goodman acknowledges, they were neither made nor approved by the authorities. More tellingly, the plays have not yet been so 'played for the most part as they have been corrected'.³⁴ The 'absurdities' Goodman finds in the Antichrist play highlight the character's performances of resurrection—they include Antichrist's return to life and his final defeat, as well as Elias blessing the bread that reveals his animation of corpses.³⁵ If these elements of the traditional Antichrist legend remained in the 1572 performance, they would coexist uncomfortably with the reformist content advertised in the Late Banns. At the very least, such a play would be one of those that Goodman describes as 'so corrected not much bettered'.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid. 136.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of Goodman's letter-book, see Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 146–51. The texts of the letters themselves appear in Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, eds, *Cheshire Including Chester*, 143–8, 168–70.

³² Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, eds, *Cheshire including Chester*, 143–4, 136.

³³ Ibid. 144–5.

³⁴ Ibid. 145–6.

³⁵ Ibid. 148.

³⁶ Ibid. 146.

One ambiguous reference present in four manuscripts hints at the awkwardness involved in retooling the Antichrist play for a changing ideological context. In these witnesses to the text, the tyrant refers to Enock and Elias as 'lowlers' or 'loullords' (428) who won't leave him alone; they 'ever be readye [him] to repreeve | and all the people of [his] lawe' (430–1). The outburst may simply classify the two prophets as idle beggars, and indeed two other manuscripts replace the term with 'lossilles', meaning 'rogue'.³⁷ In the context of the play's other references to heresy, however, the line also suggests that Antichrist is identifying the play's two spiritual authorities with Lollardy. In performance, the line might offer a sop to reformers, along the lines of the promises in the Banns: Enock and Elias, spiritual forefathers of true Christians, are also spiritual forefathers of the reformist movement. Who better than a pair of 'loullords' to show how 'Christes worde... | Confowndethe all Antechristes and, sects of yat degree'? Such an incorporation of reformist ideas would unfortunately be undercut by Elias' use of a miraculous host to destroy Antichrist's illusions. More conservatively, the dissonance between this Lollard epithet and the prophets' priestly actions might be presented as further evidence of Antichrist's spiritual ineptitude: he is so ignorant of the truth that he confuses heresy and orthodoxy. The multivalence of this single reference, coupled with the documents promising textual revision, demonstrate the contested construction of Antichrist—and the contested position of theater as a medium for sacred truths.

Revised or not, *The Coming of Antichrist* was probably last staged in 1572, for the final cycle production in 1575 left out some plays 'which were thought might not be Iustified for the superstition that was in them'.³⁸ Ironically, if the play did function as a pre-emptive containment of fraudulent performance, then its omission could, paradoxically, contribute to the perceived threat of the cycle. The 1575 production earned Chester's mayor a summons to the Privy Council in London to account for his city's repeated insubordination. Suspicion of performances could no longer be limited to the false resurrections of Antichrist—the whole cycle was now a dangerous form of theater, and a threat to the city's civic body.

³⁷ The editors suggest this alteration occurred because 'lollard' was an 'unfamiliar or objectionable term of contempt' (Lumiansky and Mills, eds, *Chester Mystery Cycle*, ii, 343). However, the two terms appear in collocation in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts (*MED* 'losel' and 'Lollard' d.)

³⁸ Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills, eds, *Cheshire including Chester*, 161.

Counterfeiting Death in *1 Henry IV*

By 1575, the traditional legend dramatized in the Chester Antichrist play had fallen out of favor in official church doctrine, and tension between late-sixteenth-century Protestantism and biblical drama soon resulted in the virtual disappearance of that genre. However, the iconoclastic anxieties explored through the Antichrist pageant and evident in Christopher Goodman's correspondence had corollaries in the London public theater as well. As Michael O'Connell has demonstrated, antitheatricalists levelled their charges of idolatry at both the regional biblical drama and the secular productions of the capital. To watch a play at the Globe, the Rose, the Blackfriars, whatever its content, was to fall captive to false images, to take for truth a show as dangerous as the equally spectacular Catholic mass.³⁹ As in the Chester *Antichrist*, reflexive moments of metadrama in the London theaters reveal playwrights' responses to these iconoclastic pressures,⁴⁰ and the connection between false resurrection and antitheatricalism persisted as that particular topos was handed down to Shakespeare's commercial theater.

In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff's false resurrection is particularly interesting because the character is partially generated from the figure of Sir John Oldcastle, remembered alternately by Tudor audiences as either an embodiment or an opponent of Antichrist. In fact, Annabel Patterson's description of Oldcastle's story could as easily apply to the legend of Antichrist: it is 'one of those cultural icons in which are epitomized a society's conflicting and shifting values'.⁴¹ Shakespeare braids elements of the Oldcastle myth together with features of the stage Antichrist in a character unrepentantly, charmingly, and sometimes treacherously theatrical. Rising from his apparent death on the Shrewsbury battlefield, Falstaff adds the stage Antichrist to the repertory of types that contribute to his capacious character—'the festive Lord of Misrule, . . . the devil, the Vice, the braggart soldier

³⁹ On antitheatricalists' charges of idolatry, see Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), esp. Ch. 1, 'Theater and the Devil's Teats'.

⁴⁰ O'Connell considers several examples of playwrights' conflicted responses to iconoclasm in Ch. 5 of *The Idolatrous Eye*, entitled 'Let the Audience Look to Their Eyes': Jonson and Shakespeare', though he does not linger long on Falstaff's resurrection.

⁴¹ Annabel Patterson, 'Sir John Oldcastle as Symbol of Reformation Historiography', in Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier, eds, *Religion, Literature and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 7. For an earlier and more widely-ranging study of sources for the Oldcastle myth, see Alice-Lyle Scoufos, *Shakespeare's Typological Satire: A Study of the Falstaff-Oldcastle Problem* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979), 44–69.

or miles gloriosus, the parasite, the fool, and . . . the grotesque Puritan'.⁴² As an Antichrist figure, he creates his own resurrections by manipulating stage conventions of 'dead' and 'living' bodies. I want first to demonstrate how Antichristian dramaturgy like that of the Chester play informs these moments, and then explain how that dramaturgy interacts with elements of the Oldcastle myth to create a clever response to Puritan antitheatrical prejudices.

The stage direction that establishes the conditions of Falstaff's deception tells us that while Hal and Hotspur fight, Douglas 'fighteth with Falstaff. He [Falstaff] falls down as if he were dead' (5.4.76SD). After killing Hotspur, Hal mourns over Falstaff's body and exits, leaving the bodies behind. Though some contemporary directors have read 'as if' to suggest that Falstaff's counterfeit of death is quickly obvious to those offstage, or even onstage,⁴³ other early modern examples of 'as if' stage directions cue an action that the audience is meant to believe.⁴⁴ By 'playing' dead, Falstaff pulls a metatheatrical trick on audience expectation, not unlike that perpetrated by Antichrist at the beginning of the Chester play. Barbara Hodgdon observes:

the pause that invariably follows Hal's exit certainly invites spectators to believe in both deaths [Falstaff's and Hotspur's]: even when 'Falstaff riseth up' to fals-ify the illusion, it is only his ability to speak . . . that codes the moment as something other than a curtain call where, eventually, the two other bodies onstage—the players of Hotspur and Blunt, dressed in armor that counterfeits the King—would also rise to acknowledge spectators' applause.⁴⁵

The construction of this trick and the one-two punch it delivers merit further attention. As Hodgdon notes, when Falstaff stands and speaks, we realize first that the play is not over, and then that the character is alive in front of us—the 'something other than a curtain call' appears to be his resurrection. The careful staging of Falstaff's 'dead' body magnifies the impact of this moment; his 'corpse' lies onstage for thirty-three lines, and is mourned over by a central, trusted character. Hal's response when he sees Falstaff alive again suggests

⁴² Thomas McAlindon, *Shakespeare's Tudor History: A Study of Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 76.

⁴³ See, for example, Welles' *Chimes at Midnight*, where Hal sees breath steaming up Falstaff's visor as he mourns him.

⁴⁴ See 'as [if]' in *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642*, ed. Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 159.

the shock of the resurrection moment: 'I saw him dead, | Breathless and bleeding on the ground... Thou art not what thou seem'st' (5.4.133–4, 137). Dramaturgically, his resurrection is more effective than that of the Chester Antichrist. But our next shock, no less tied to the staging of the body, is that the character was never dead. In this respect Falstaff is more forthright in his deceptions than Antichrist, since he acknowledges (to us, at least) that he faked his demise.⁴⁶

By taking the audience into his confidence, Falstaff parodies a feature of surviving resurrection dramas. In four such plays Christ emerges from the tomb surrounded by unconscious or sleeping soldiers, and directly addresses the audience. He announces his triumph over death, displays his wounds, and links his passion to the sacrifice of the Eucharist.⁴⁷ When 'Falstaff riseth up' (5.4.111SD), the bodies of Hotspur, and probably Blount, also lie onstage, suggesting resurrection iconography.⁴⁸ However, Falstaff's post-resurrection speech mocks the themes treated by Christ at this moment. Its very first sentence ridicules the body as eucharistic sacrament, for Falstaff swears, 'if thou embowel me to-day, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too to-morrow' (5.4.111–13). As they invoke processes for preserving a corpse, embowelment and powdering,

⁴⁶ It is perhaps possible that the trick is even more complex, and that the *content* of Falstaff's speech, rather than the *fact* of his speech, shows that the play is still underway. In this reading, the audience first assumes that the play is over; then with Falstaff's speaking, they assume he is giving an epilogue; then they realize that the character has risen; and finally realize that the character has faked his death. Mariko Ichikawa notes how epilogues provide a transition for 'onstage corpses to return to the actual bodies of the actors'. However, the epilogues she discusses are all delivered by characters still alive at the end of the play. See 'What to Do with a Corpse? Physical Reality and the Fictional World in the Shakespearean Theatre', *Theatre Research International* 29 (2004), 211.

⁴⁷ See Chester 18.154–85, N-Town 35.73–88, Towneley 26.230–350, and *Christus Redivivus* III. i.148–51, in the following editions: Lumiansky and Mills, eds, *Chester Mystery Cycle*; Stephen Spector, ed., *The N-Town Play*, vol. 1, EETS ss 11 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds, *The Towneley Plays*, vol. 2, EETS ss 14 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); Nicholas Grimald, *Christus Redivivus*, in *The Life and Poems of Nicholas Grimald*, ed. L. R. Merrill, Yale Studies in English 69 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925).

⁴⁸ No quarto or folio stage direction calls for the removal of Blount's body. Arden 3 editor David Scott Kastan inserts a direction for Falstaff to 'Exit with Blount's body' after Falstaff's comments on his 'grinning honor' (5.3.60), though he acknowledges in a note that Blount's body could remain onstage until the end of the scene; see Kastan's edition of *King Henry IV, Part 1*, (London: Thompson Learning, 2002). For several visual representations of Christ rising amidst unconscious soldiers, see M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963), plates 2b, 9a and 9b.

the lines highlight the fleshliness of the body and set up its consumption as a literal and gruesome act, a distorted version of the Real Presence.⁴⁹ Instead of experiencing and triumphing over death, Falstaff imitates death and presents that imitation as triumph: 'to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed' (5.4.117–19). As Jeffrey Knapp observes, this understanding of representative practice as a life-giving process resonates in some ways with the Protestant view of communion.⁵⁰ However, in the context of the scene's iconography, Falstaff's words function as an attempt to pass off false resurrection as the real thing, a juggling trick worthy of Antichrist. As the 'true and perfect image of life indeed' he lays claim to the corporeal reality that theologians were at pains to attribute to Christ's post-resurrection body, but possesses it through performance of death rather than a miracle.⁵¹

The mystery of Christ's unobserved resurrection, accomplished only in the presence of inert soldiers, presents the opportunistic Falstaff with a chance to 'resurrect' another character as well. Standing above Hotspur, he decides to reinvent the rebel's last moments, and usurp credit for his death: 'Why may he not rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me' (5.4.126–7). The remark teases the audience, who of course is observing the whole thing, and also plays with the antitheatrical bias against sight as a means to know truth, for only a witness to the events can contradict the account that Falstaff offers upon meeting Hal. This narrative resurrects Hotspur, only to kill him again for Falstaff's own glory: 'we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock...I'll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh' (5.4.147–51). The last part of the speech is true: in addition to altering the events of Hotspur's death, Falstaff debases the corpse with a wound of his own. The success of his story

⁴⁹ OED 'embowel' I. 1.; 'powder' v¹ 3.a.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Knapp, 'Author, King, and Christ in Shakespeare's Histories', forthcoming in *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, ed. Kenneth Graham and Phillip Collington (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁵¹ Heinrich Bullinger, for example, emphasizes the 'very same true body' or 'true substantial body' of the resurrected Christ, and argues that believers will also be raised in a 'right true' body, glorified so that infirmities fall away. See Heinrich Bullinger, *The hope of the faythful declaryng brefely and clearlye the resurreccion of Our Lorde Jesus Chryst past, and of our true esse[n]cial bodyes to come*, trans. Miles Coverdale (Wesel, 1555), 4–5, 110–22 (STC 25249). See also the discussion of resurrected bodies in Thomas Draxe, *The Earnest of our Inheritance: together with a description of the new heauen and the new earth, and a demonstration of the glorious resurrection of the bodie in the same substance* (London, 1613), 47–57 (STC 7184).

damages Percy's physical body as well as his lasting reputation—which no doubt would matter more to Hotspur. If losing to Hal wounded Hotspur's honor, how much worse it is to have been 'killed' by Falstaff. The link between Falstaff and Hotspur's resurrections is underscored by the image of Falstaff carrying Hotspur off the battlefield. This image may prompt the fat knight's joke 'I am not a double man' (5.4.138), a remark which also insists on Falstaff's claim to life. His soul is still housed within his body; he is no ghost.

Ironically, this repudiation of doubleness also calls attention to the identification of Falstaff with Sir John Oldcastle or Lord Cobham, and to the accounts of his life, also doubled, or divided, in their ideological underpinnings. Most scholars concur that the name was revised out of the playtext at the insistence of Oldcastle's influential descendant William Brooke, the 10th Lord Cobham and also Lord Chamberlain from August 1596 to March 1597; however, the suppressed identification continued to survive in popular consciousness.⁵² Indeed, the Falstaff-like character in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, printed in the same year as the quarto of *1 Henry IV*, retained the name of Sir John Oldcastle along with the less flattering nickname of 'Jockey'. In both of the competing legends of Oldcastle's life Shakespeare would have found elements of false resurrection and Antichrist references, features which hover behind Falstaff's Antichrist-like performance on Shrewsbury field, and allow Shakespeare to deflect the designation of Antichrist away from the institution of theater and onto an historic individual.⁵³

The Catholic account of Oldcastle emphasized Lord Cobham as a traitor, heretic, and danger to the realm, justly punished by being hung in chains and burned. This version saw the Lollard knight as a type of Antichrist, complete with false promises of resurrection. Medieval chronicler Thomas Elmham called him a 'snare of Satan' or 'infernal Satellite', and carefully explained

⁵² Scholarly discussion of Shakespeare's use of Oldcastle's name and the resulting censorship, as well as the decision of the Oxford Shakespeare editors to reinstate the character's name is extensive; key articles include Gary Taylor, 'The Fortunes of Oldcastle', *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985), 85–100; *idem*, 'William Shakespeare, Richard James and the House of Cobham', *RES* ns 38 (1987), 334–54; Kristen Poole, 'Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the Staging of Puritanism', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46 (1995), 47–75; and David Scott Kastan, 'Killed with Hard Opinions: Oldcastle, Falstaff, and the Reformed Text of *1 Henry IV*', in *Textual Formations and Reformations*, ed. Laurie E. Maguire and Thomas L. Berger (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1998), 211–27.

⁵³ For a different approach to Falstaff's relationship with history and theater, see Brian Walsh's essay in this volume, 'Chantry, Chronicle, Cockpit: *Henry V* and the Forms of History', in this volume, esp. pp. 167–70.

how numbers represented by the letters of his name corresponded to 666, the number of the Beast, while the Carmelite Thomas of Walsingham reported Cobham's prophecy of his own resurrection.⁵⁴ The views of such authors influenced John Stow in his *Annales*; though Stow muted some of the animus of his sources, the enmity emerges in his description of Oldcastle as 'a most peruerse enimie to the state of the church at that time'.⁵⁵ Stow also included Oldcastle's Antichrist-like and unfulfilled intent to 'rise from death to life again, the third day' resulting in 'peace and quiet' for 'his sect'.⁵⁶

The other version, passed on to Foxe through Tyndale and Bale, praised the Lord Cobham as a martyr to the evangelical cause and rehabilitated the prophecy element.⁵⁷ For these writers, it is the institutional Antichrist of the Catholic Church, not Oldcastle, that deceives with fraudulent shows. Foxe omits Stow's allusion to an Antichrist who would die and rise, but retains and amplifies the reference to multiple Antichrists that medieval chroniclers offered as evidence of the knight's heresy. Of the papacy and the religious hierarchy, for example, Foxe's Lord Cobham testifies, 'Rome is the very neste of Antichriste. And out of that neste cometh all the disciples. Of whome Prelates, Priestes and Monkes are the body, and these pylde friers are the taylor, whiche couereth his moste fylthy part'.⁵⁸ Despite this proto-reformist statement, Foxe's Oldcastle can also be read as Elijah, witnessing against Antichrist. This identification would fly in the face of Protestant disdain for

⁵⁴ Thomas Elmham, *Liber Metricus de Henrico Quinto*, in *Memorials of Henry the Fifth, King of England*, ed. Charles Augustus Cole (London: Longman 1858), 156, 96; *Thomae Walsingham, quondam Monachi S. Albani, Historia Anglicana*, Rolls Series 28/1, ed. H. T. Riley (London: Public Record Office, 1864), 2:328.

⁵⁵ John Stow, *The annales of England: faithfully collected out of the most autenticall authors, records, and other monuments of antiquitie, from the first inhabitation vntill this present yeere 1592 by Iohn Stow citizen of London* (London, 1592), 550, (STC 23334). Scoufos records a fascinating coda to the execution: 'This promise of resurrection brought a considerable crowd of Oldcastle's followers to St. Giles field on the appointed day where they awaited the miracle; when Oldcastle failed to appear, they gathered his ashes to rub in their eyes' (*Shakespeare's Typological Satire*, 55–6). Scoufos does not provide the source for this snippet of the legend, and I have been unable to locate it in the chronicles she mentions. Whatever its source, the legend continues the theme of Antichrist's visual deception—when the prophesied marvel does not occur, Antichrist's followers perpetuate their spiritual blindness with the ashes of their leader.

⁵⁶ Stow, *The annales of England*, 572.

⁵⁷ John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes...* (London, 1563), 261–81 (STC 11222).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 269.

the legendary life. However, the martyrologist later explicitly compares Lord Cobham with Elijah, explaining Oldcastle's claim to resurrection:

Thys is not to be forgotten which is reported by many that he should say that he should die here in earth after the sort and manner of Helias, the whyche whether it sprang of the common people wythoute cause. or that it was forshewed by him, I thynk it not without good consideration. or *yat* it sprang not without with some gift of prophecy, the end of the matter doth suffyciently proue. For lyke as when Helias should leaue this mortal life, he was caryed in a fiery charyot into immortality: euen so the order of thys mannes death not beinge muche vnlike, followed the fygure of his departure. For he fyrste of all being lyfted vp vpon the galowes, as into a chariot, and compassed in round aboute wyth flamynge fyre, what other thyng I pray you dyd thys most holy martir of Christ represent then onely a fygure of a certayne Helias flying up into heauen. The whych went vp into heauen by a fiery chariot.⁵⁹

The comparison resolutely ignores Stowe's detail of a resurrection after three days, replacing it instead with the deathless ascension Elijah experiences in 2 Kings 2:1. However, the placement of this *apologia* after Oldcastle confronts Antichrist's forces encourages readers to recollect Elijah's role in the Antichrist legend.

From these competing portrayals of Cobham the all-too-human traitor, who claims he will rise but fails to do so, and Cobham the martyr, whose end is reimagined as a mysterious apotheosis, Shakespeare fashions Falstaff, who performs a resurrection by faking his own demise. His ability to 'counterfeit' extends not only to his own death and life, but also to Hotspur's, and through the latter he is able to usurp honor from both the dead Percy and the living prince.⁶⁰ By combining the dramaturgy of Antichrist with the Oldcastle myth, Shakespeare turns the tables on Puritan hagiography and implicates the 'godly' hero in the same deceptive performances his descendants castigated. Instead of Oldcastle the proto-Puritan champion battling an institutional Antichrist, that dangerous and theatrical Catholic hierarchy, Shakespeare limns Oldcastle as an individual Antichrist figure from the traditional legend, a vehicle, as we have seen in the Chester play, for staging and containing the dangers of theater.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 281.

⁶⁰ New Cambridge editors Herbert and Judith Weil see other hints in the historical record that might have prompted Falstaff's resurrection—the fact that Oldcastle escaped from the Tower of London, hints that Richard II had not been killed at Pomfret, and finally the chronicler's image of Henry IV being 'raised' by virtue of others fighting in his likeness. Surprisingly, they do not include the story of Oldcastle's claim to resurrection. See Weil and Weil, eds, *The First Part of King Henry IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 27–8.

The antitheatrical anxieties inherent in the staging of false resurrections render this episode a fitting conclusion to the usurpation and playacting thematized throughout *1 Henry IV*. King Henry expresses his desires to cleanse himself of his guilt for usurping the throne from Richard II, and the Prince needs to replace this image of King as usurper with his own kingship. He characterizes his fraternization with Falstaff and the rest of the Boar's Head crew as a calculated performance, designed to set the stage for a greater role—his 'reformation', which will thus 'show more goodly and attract more eyes' (1.2.213–14), but his continued association with an Antichrist figure who usurps honor and power taints the premiere of Hal's role as princely warrior and noble monarch-to-be. Had Shakespeare ended the play with the repudiation of Falstaff found in *2 Henry IV*, then the play might have concluded as Travis suggests the Chester cycle ends, with the defeat of profane, Antichristian drama functioning to purify the other drama of the cycle. However, the fact that Hal recognizes and rewards the deception makes him party to these false resurrections. If Falstaff presents a type of Antichrist, then Hal's remuneration for the performance revises the role of the kings of the world, who eventually recognize the deceiver's theatrics, repent their misplaced worship, and reject Antichrist. In contrast, by promising to 'gild' the lie (5.4.157–8) the Prince hints at a financial return and commits himself to enhancing the impression Falstaff's specious claim makes on others.⁶¹ For Hal, such a reward may simply recognize the boldness of the fat knight's performance, but it also gives the counterfeits a royal imprimatur as truth. Though the Prince has earlier vowed to cast off 'plump Jack' (2.4.479–81), the play concludes with an unsettling affirmation of Falstaff's false resurrection. In effect, Falstaff succeeds in rising where the historic Oldcastle failed, and wins 'peace and quiet'—as well as financial profit—through the Prince's collaboration in the fraud.

We may appropriately feel apprehension at Hal's indulgent patronage of this last audacious lie; such disquiet not only is a legacy of previous versions of the Oldcastle story, but also serves Shakespeare's purposes in his own manipulation of the myth. The faults of Oldcastle leak out onto the Prince in other tellings as well; chroniclers who demonized the Lollard knight had to negotiate the King's demonstrations of affection and mercy, while evangelicals had the awkward tasks of lauding a 'hero' who was known as a traitor to the anointed king and representing Oldcastle as morally superior to the spiritually

⁶¹ OED 'gild' v¹ 3, 5.

misguided ruler. A similar awkwardness characterizes our last glimpse of the purportedly reformed Hal sanctioning the false resurrection. But the tension of Hal's final choice in the play and the unease generated by his decision reveal Shakespeare's deliberate engagement with iconoclasm. He acknowledges theater's moral malleability and highlights Hal's failure to act on the knowledge he has already admitted: that Falstaff's brand of performance, alluring as it is, would create a fault line in the foundation of Hal's rule. While he gives some credit to the playhouses' critics by granting that theater can dangerously deceive, Shakespeare cannily qualifies that concession by modeling such a performance on one of their greatest heroes.

The Challenge of Discernment

Speaking of the Chester Antichrist's marvels, David Mills notes that the play 'can be read as a warning of how readily illusion can become delusion when it is divorced from moral function', and points to the witnesses Enock and Elias, unmaskers of the false resurrections, as 'an absolute point of reference beyond the self-validating world of illusions'.⁶² However, such an 'absolute point of reference' is not always clear in the shifting religious environments, performance practices, and textual instability of early English drama. When Enock and Elias resemble both Catholic priests and Lollards, and when Hal conspires to promote counterfeits that reference both Antichrist and a 'godly' martyr, the audience's work in discerning moral function of theatrical illusion becomes quite complex. While the Chester play's antitheatrical ambiguity results from a once-stable set of referents thrown into disarray during its production history, Shakespeare deliberately courts a hermeneutic dilemma, using hagiographic parody to stage an Antichristian performance that invites iconoclastic censure, then licensing it with the prince's approval.

The tactic prevents us from finding a totalizing understanding of the ethics of Falstaff's performance in either royal authority or hagiography. Instead we must consider the event such marvels or counterfeits purport to reproduce.

⁶² David Mills, "'None Had the Like nor the Like Darste Set Out': The City of Chester and Its Mystery Cycle", in *Staging the Chester Cycle*, ed. David Mills (Leeds: School of English, Univ. of Leeds, 1985), 11–12.

Such false resurrections are most dangerous because they fail to perpetuate the values and effects of their supposed model, Christ's resurrection. Dramatic vitality and divine truth can coincide in theater, as shown in 'true' resurrection moments, but instead of reinscribing generosity, self-sacrifice, and healing, the episodes I have discussed here demonstrate usurpation, self-aggrandizement, and violation of others' bodies. Through the medium of theater they urge audiences to careful consumption of that art as well as skeptical consideration of its critics, just as they urge us to attentive readings of early English drama's multivocal religious images and subjects.

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Shakespeare's Medieval Morality

The Merchant of Venice and the *Gesta Romanorum*

Rebecca Krug

In Act 2 of *The Merchant of Venice*, Launcelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant, imagines himself as the hero of a medieval morality play. Standing alone on stage, Launcelot narrates an inner struggle between his conscience and 'the fiend' in which the two discuss Launcelot's ongoing service to Shylock. According to Launcelot, his own conscience, like the Good Angel in medieval morality plays, urges him to stay with Shylock and to continue to serve his master faithfully. The fiend, on the other hand, like the earlier drama's 'Malus Angelus,' encourages Launcelot to leave Shylock's household, crying, 'away!... for the heavens, rouse up a brave mind... and run' (2.2.11–13). Presenting Launcelot's inner conflict as an allegory in which good and evil argue with one another, Shakespeare, in *The Merchant of Venice*, follows medieval dramatic practice. Like Everyman and Mankind, the heroes of medieval moralities, Launcelot draws the play's audience into his ethical struggle by analyzing his choice in front of the audience. Launcelot speaks directly to the audience, giving them a 'blow by blow' account of his struggle. In doing so, he involves the audience in his decision to run away from his master and offers them as well as himself an opportunity to move from allegorical abstraction to moral action.

Modern readers of Shakespeare are most familiar with medieval, ethical concerns as expressed in morality plays such as *Everyman*, *Mankind*, and the *Castle of Perseverance*; the plays were certainly important models for the playwright.

But perhaps the most significant medieval literary work for the composition of the *Merchant* is a collection of stories called the *Gesta Romanorum*. In these well-known stories—which are believed to have been gathered together for use by medieval preachers—a seemingly unnatural, unreasonable, or inexplicable incident is the basis for an episode in which characters, who are psychologically ‘flat,’ respond to surprising circumstances. Although it is sometimes thought that Shakespeare was interested in medieval material like the *Gesta* for the didactic, spiritual allegories attached to the narratives, it seems to me more likely that late medieval as well as Renaissance readers and audiences were drawn to the narratives themselves. The stories from the *Gesta*, I argue, that are incorporated into Shakespeare’s plays, and in particular in the *Merchant*, served as moral experiments that audience members witnessed and experienced during performance. Shakespeare’s dramatic practice was influenced by this medieval, narrative / ethical tradition, and a consideration of the *Merchant* alongside the tales that it draws upon demonstrates how much Shakespeare’s sense of morality was shaped by medieval understandings.¹

In this essay, I trace the way the *Merchant* takes up four moral tales drawn from or related to the *Gesta Romanorum*. I refer to them as follows: the Debate between the Daughters of God, the Bond Story, the Casket Story, and the Friendship of Barlaam and Josaphat. In working with these medieval sources, the *Merchant*, like medieval morality plays such as the one mimicked in the play itself by Launcelot Gobbo, insists that audience members consider their own ethical decision-making process as they view the drama. Shakespeare’s use of stories from the *Gesta* is, I argue, intentionally moral and concerned with social interaction. Moral narratives, rather than religious tenets or historical practices were, I maintain, what appealed to Shakespeare when he turned to medieval literature.² At the end of the essay, I return to the nature of this ‘Renaissance’ treatment of medieval material.

¹ The *Gesta* is often mentioned as one of Shakespeare’s sources but rarely analyzed in detail. For a discussion of exemplum materials including the *Gesta* in relation to Shakespeare’s plays see Beatrice Daw Brown’s treatment of *Macbeth*: ‘Exemplum Materials Underlying *Macbeth*,’ *PMLA* 50 (1935), 700–714. On Shakespeare’s sources for the casket and bond plots (both at least in part *Gesta* stories) in the *Merchant* see Milton A. Levy, ‘Did Shakespeare Join the Casket and Bond Plots in *The Merchant of Venice*?’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960), 388–391.

² Recently, many critics have become interested in discussing continuities between the medieval and early modern periods. See, for example, James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

The *Gesta Romanorum*

Before moving explicitly into a discussion of the *Merchant*, it is useful to contextualize the *Gesta* and to identify the general tenor of arguments about Shakespeare's use of medieval sources. The *Gesta Romanorum* is thought to have been compiled late in the thirteenth century. The collection of stories is presumed to have been made as a handbook for preachers. Critics have speculated about the compiler, and recently Brigitte Weiske suggested that the collection may have been the work of a Franciscan.³ There is, however, little hard evidence concerning the compilation's origin. What is known is that multiple versions of the stories appeared and circulated widely among clerical and lay readers from the fourteenth century on. Medieval authors including Chaucer, Gower, and Hoccleve were familiar with stories from the *Gesta*, and the narratives were important sources for many anonymous writers as well.⁴

By the early sixteenth century, Wynkyn de Worde had printed an influential English version of the *Gesta*.⁵ Scholars generally assume that Shakespeare (as well as later writers including Bunyan and Defoe) read Richard Robinson's 1577 revised and abbreviated version of de Worde's edition.⁶ It is a likely guess. However, since the stories themselves appear in so many different collections and literary works, it is impossible to prove that any later retelling came directly out of the 'official' *Gesta* collections.⁷ There is a good deal of overlap between stories in various versions of the *Gesta*, for example, and saints' lives such as those in the wildly popular *Golden Legend*. Rather than fixing originary sources

³ On the history of the *Gesta* see Weiske's two volume *Gesta Romanorum* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1992). Weiske, in contrast with the present essay, finds the allegories from the *Gesta* to be the most important aspect of the collection. In her second volume, Weiske includes English, Latin, and German versions of parts of the *Gesta*.

⁴ For example, concerning anonymous romance writers and their use of the *Gesta*, see Diane Speed, 'Middle English Romance and the *Gesta Romanorum*,' in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance*, ed. Rosalind Field (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 45–56.

⁵ Wynkyn de Worde's first edition appeared in 1496. The text was accompanied by woodcuts. See STC 21286.3 (1510 edition) and STC 21286.7 (1525 edition).

⁶ A facsimile edition of Robinson's 1595 text is available. See *Gesta Romanorum: A Record of Auncient Histories Newly Perused by Richard Robinson*, ed. John Weld (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimilies and Reprints, 1973).

⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between Continental and English versions, see *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, EETS ES 33 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), xiv–xxii. For the Latin editions see *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1872).

precisely, the important point is that later writers including Shakespeare were familiar with many of these stories, in various versions, and that the narratives influenced later writers' imaginative understanding of the Middle Ages and of medieval literature. Like classical stories and chronicle accounts, medieval stories such as those in the *Gesta* offered later writers narratives that could be reshaped, reinterpreted, or reinvented.

Although literary writers were drawn to the variety of narratives found in the *Gesta*, it has been the *form* of the stories in the *Gesta* (and in other collections like it) that has had the most profound influence on criticism about medieval literature. In particular, works such as the *Gesta* are largely responsible for critical methodologies that emphasize the allegorical nature of medieval literature. Due to the form of the stories in the *Gesta* and other story collections like it, in which a moral is attached to a free-standing narrative, such works seem to license a reading of medieval literature as predominantly idealistic, Christian allegory.⁸

Each story in the medieval and Renaissance English versions of the *Gesta*, includes an explicit moral following the narrative. Perhaps surprisingly, these morals are nearly the same regardless of the selection's narrative content: in almost every case, these 'stories of emperors' are explained as spiritual allegories in which the relationship between God (the emperor) and the soul (a human character) is explicated. The fairly consistent nature of the moralizations in the *Gesta* has led critics to focus on this aspect of the stories. Indeed, this tendency in medieval writing generally has led critics such as D. W. Robertson to assert that all medieval literature must be read in relation to Christian 'charity.'⁹

The fact that explicit morals are sometimes affixed to medieval narratives is often used to argue that direct allegorization of content forms the basis for the use of medieval material in Shakespeare's plays. For example, in an important and still

⁸ The form was popular well into the late Middle Ages. See, for example, Christine de Pisan's *Epistle of Othea*, which appeared in an English translation by Stephen Scrope in the middle of the fifteenth century: Stephen Scrope, trans., *The Epistle of Othea*, ed. Curt F. Bühler, EETS 264 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970).

⁹ D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives*, 3rd paperback ed. (1962; rpt., Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973). Robertson's views were challenged by 'new critical' scholars such as E. Talbot Donaldson, Derek Pearsall, and Alfred David. Recently, some critics concerned with medieval religious culture may be seen as returning, at least in part, to a modified 'Robertsonianism.'

widely cited essay from 1962, Barbara Lewalski argued that in the *Merchant* ‘consistent and unmistakable allegorical meanings’ can be traced in the play and that these patterns reveal ‘an important theological dimension.’¹⁰ In discussing the casket scene, Lewalski suggests that Shakespeare, like the medieval compiler of the tale that serves as its source, drew an explicit allegorical connection between the story and the ‘choice of the paths to spiritual life or death.’¹¹ She suggests that narrative details are reducible to a theological structure in which the person making the choice represents the soul and its worthiness to wed the Son of God. In the *Merchant*, specifically, this analogy transforms Antonio into a Christ-figure who makes it possible for Bassanio, ‘the true Christian,’ to choose the spiritual life of loving God.¹²

If the value in the stories is seen as inhering in the morals, the *Gesta Romanorum* certainly seems to support this allegorical approach to medieval material in Shakespeare’s plays. This kind of allegorization was widespread in medieval writing, and to deny the importance of this tradition would be to miss an important aspect of medieval critical thinking. However, despite the importance of this allegorical tradition, especially for the medieval clerical establishment, it does not seem to be the motive behind literary writers’ adoption of the stories from the *Gesta*. In a discussion of medieval romance authors and the *Gesta*’s influence, Diane Speed, for instance, has observed that the moralizations from the tales rarely enter into romances: ‘Although the manner of moralisations may help to identify an exemplum as belonging to the *Gesta*, they have themselves been of little significance in relating the exempla to the romances—only the narrative is usually referred to.’¹³ This is suggestive when we think about the *Merchant*. If, as Speed concludes, transmission tended to favor narrative over moralization when the stories were used by later writers, it seems likely that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences were drawn to the stories themselves and not to the relatively homogeneous moralizations.

As narratives, the stories from the *Gesta* follow a consistent pattern in which two seemingly disparate narrative components are brought together: the familiar, often in the form of familial dynamics and emotional conflicts, and

¹⁰ Lewalski, ‘Biblical Allusion and Allegory in *The Merchant of Venice*,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962), 328.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹² *Ibid.*, 336.

¹³ Speed, ‘Middle English Romance,’ 54-5.

the supernatural or inexplicable. The *Gesta* is filled with tales about events that feel recognizable as situations requiring human action but that also seem, from the perspective of realism, impossible or improbable: a shame-filled woman cannot wash blood from her hand; a lion slays an adulteress in a crowd and leaves all innocent bystanders standing; a woman's suitors disappear in a magical garden. As part of the familiar component, the characters in the story never express surprise over events despite the strangeness of the circumstances: the inexplicable is naturalized in the stories, and the characters are required to respond as if the event were part of realistic, everyday life.

If, then, narrative rather than moral drew readers and writers to the *Gesta*, how do we understand the embeddedness of tales from the collection in later works such as the *Merchant*? Although the meanings are not, as I have suggested, 'consistent' and 'unmistakeable,' the stories are, nonetheless, involved in a relational dynamic that has similarities with the allegorized readings in the *Gesta*'s moralizations. Rather than pointing to relationships between God the Father, the soul, and sin, the *Gesta*'s stories, and Shakespeare's adaptation of those stories, are insistently social and moral in orientation. For this reason, rather than seeing this medieval material as introducing idealized Christian allegory, we might, instead, see it as seeking to involve the audience in the process of moralization and interpretation. The stories *demand* further reflection on the characters' actions. They are enigmatic, and that is why preaching collections offer Christianized 'answers' to the stories. Readers no doubt enjoyed comparing the 'answers' given in the moralized sections to the narratives. But another way to deal with this enigmatic quality, and one, I think, that accounts for the popularity of collections like the *Gesta*, is to think of it as the quality in itself for which readers looked. Because they valued and enjoyed the process of interpretation that pointed not just at the story's characters but at themselves, readers were drawn to these tales and writers saw possibilities for story development in their sparse yet entertaining narrative outlines. I now turn to Shakespeare's use of the *Gesta* in the *Merchant* in order to illustrate this idea.

The Debate of the Daughters of God

The *Merchant* concerns itself with the relationship between mercy and justice: how, it asks, can these seemingly contradictory ideals operate simultaneously?

Act 4 of the play, in which Portia disguises herself as the judge Balthasar, transforms this young woman looking for a husband following the dictates of her father's will, into Mercy personified. Her well-known speech from the act's first scene, in which 'the quality of mercy is not strain'd' (4.1.184), is clearly indebted to the medieval story of the Daughters of God. The story, in which the daughters Mercy, Truth, Justice, and Peace appeal to their Father for support in deciding the fate of a sinner, was a staple of didactic writing from the medieval period, especially drama: *Mankind*, the *Castle of Perseverance*, and the *Court of Sapience* include versions of the debate. The episode appears in a number of non-dramatic texts from the Middle Ages as well including the late thirteenth-century *Cursor Mundi* and Lydgate's *Praise of Peace*.

Although varying in some details, the medieval stories, and especially the plays, usually show the debate as occurring before God the Father.¹⁴ Each sister appeals to her Father, directing her arguments for her own priority toward Him and appealing to His nature, and to his filial love. Truth's rebuke, found in the Middle English *Gesta*, is typical: she tells her Father, the Emperor Agios in this version, 'thow hast ever be trewe and sothefast, and it is truthe that he [the sinner] have peyne and dethe, therefor, fadir, pursue trewth, as thow hast be holden her afore; for yf thow pursue not truth, thow shalt not have me thi dowter no more.'¹⁵ The four sisters turn to God the Father to resolve the case against the sinner. In the version of the story that appears in the morality play called the *Castle of Perseverance*, which the *Merchant* seems to echo, the Father agrees that humans should be judged 'Not aftyr deserving' but, rather, according to mercy. Otherwise, He explains, no human could spend eternity in heaven.¹⁶

In the *Merchant*, Portia cautions Shylock in language that is reminiscent of the *Castle of Perseverance*: 'Though justice be thy plea, consider this, | That in the course of justice, none of us | Should see salvation' (4.1.198–200). She insists that mercy should 'season[] justice,' (4.1.197) and explains that there is a lesson in the story of Shylock: 'We do pray for mercy, | And that same prayer doth

¹⁴ For variations on this theme see Sister Mary Immaculate, 'The Four Daughters of God in the *Gesta Romanorum* and the *Court of Sapience*,' *PMLA* 57 (1942), 951–65.

¹⁵ *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 133.

¹⁶ *The Castle of Perseverance in Medieval Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), lines 3565; 3572–3573. In the *Gesta*, the Emperor turns to his Son for counsel in the matter; ultimately the Son brings the sinner back to the Emperor after the Son and Mercy visit him in prison; Peace returns when she hears the news and the family is reunited.

teach us all to render | The deeds of mercy' (4.1.200–202). The 'we' and the 'us' in this passage reach out to include everyone who hears Mercy / Portia's words, including Shylock (who might appear to be outside this Christian-sounding idea) and the play's audience. There is no doubt that this is represented as a religious idea—the language of salvation is explicitly invoked—but it is not a religious idea that simply reflects on the soul's relationship to God, as is suggested in the allegory found in the *Gesta*. In describing Mercy's role, the *Gesta* focuses on God's attributes: 'whenne mercy sawe this, that the sarvaunt was turnid ayene, she had no mater to playne . . . for hir fadir was founden true.'¹⁷

But in addition to her spiritual message, Mercy / Portia is also explicitly concerned with the importance of mercy in domestic and social life. Shylock's failings are represented by the play as both familial (his problems with Jessica, his mistreatment of domestic help like Launcelot Gobbo) and social (his refusal, first, to eat with Christians and, more importantly, to follow business principles that are in his and society's economic interest). Shylock, Mercy / Portia argues, must relinquish the letter of the law in favor of mercy that will make life in Venice, and Belmont, run more smoothly. Her intervention is explicitly aimed at making groups who are at odds, here Christians and Jews, work together in harmony.

The Bond

Portia's role in the play fluctuates between the human and the abstract, almost as if she encompassed both the story and the moral portions of the *Gesta* chapters. As Mercy in Act 4, she sheds what we might think of as her 'romance clothing'—her appearance as a young, wealthy woman in need of a husband—when she puts on Balthasar's robes and emerges as an allegorical figure. Although it might seem like a forced shift, her transition from heroine to allegorized virtue develops logically from her initial presentation in the play as a dutiful daughter and, more importantly, as a woman concerned explicitly with good deeds.

Shakespeare's Portia is linked to the woman in the *Gesta*'s story of the bond through her position as a daughter with a lover (or, rather, suitor in *Merchant*) and

¹⁷ *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 135.

through her assumption of the role of disguised, wise woman. It is possible that Shakespeare only knew the story of the bond through an Italian source, Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*, but since the Italian version is drawn from the *Gesta*, it seems reasonable to look at Shakespeare's treatment in relation to the original source.¹⁸

Like the Italian version, the *Gesta*'s treatment of the bond story is surprisingly racy. In particular, both Fiorentino's and the *Gesta*'s plots concern sexual intrigue as the motive behind the financial risks that lead to the signing of the bond. The Italian version is about a beautiful widow who entraps potential lovers in order to take their ships and goods; the *Gesta*'s is about a knight who is unworthy of the emperor's daughter yet convinces her to sleep with him for a large sum of money. In both versions, the women are as amoral as the men who want to sleep with them. The widow tricks Giannetto, drugging him so he cannot have sex with her and then taking his ship and goods while he sleeps; the emperor's daughter inserts a magic, sleep-inducing letter between her sheets, preventing the knight from fulfilling his desires, and, because he keeps making the same bad bargain with her, bankrupting him.

Both texts show little interest in the woman's lack of virtue. The *Gesta* feebly attempts to allegorize the immorality of the daughter by calling her 'the sowle' and describing the knight as 'every worldly man' who 'stirith' the soul to sin, yet it brushes aside the woman's complicity in the arrangement, never calling attention to the fact that she is taking money for sex or that she compounds her sin through deception and magic.¹⁹ *Il Pecorone* describes the widow as having 'ruined' many men, but aside from this, treats the incident without moral commentary and passes no judgment on the widow's actions.

Shakespeare's Portia, in contrast, worries about doing what is right. Not only is she neither a ruinous widow nor a mercenary deceiver, she is the daughter of a man who was 'ever virtuous' (1.2.27) and she herself is actively concerned with the application of ethical principles. When first introduced in Act 1, Portia comments explicitly on the difficulty of acting morally:

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own

¹⁸ An English translation of the Italian is found in the Arden edition of the play: William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1955), Appendix 1, 140. For the Italian, see Giovanni Fiorentino, *Il Pecorone*, IV, I, ed. Enzo Esposito (Ravenna: Longo, 1974).

¹⁹ *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 158–65.

instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree. (1.2.12–19)

She cuts her own reflections short at this point, 'this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband' (1.2.21–2), but the speech serves as a frame for thinking about her subsequent actions in terms of morality. The theme is carried through the rest of the play, including Portia's comment in the fifth act in which she compares a candle in the window to good deeds: 'That light we see is burning in my hall. | How far that little candle throws his beams! | So shines a good deed in a naughty world' (5.1.89–91). In Shakespeare's play, the woman from the earlier versions of the bond story is transformed into a thoughtful and concerned citizen.

This transformation is essential to our understanding of Shakespeare's play because it changes the relationship between individual motivation and action established in the *Gesta* and *Il Pecorone*. In the earlier texts, the woman acts out of self-interest. First, she is wrapped up in monetary profiteering. Second, after she has embarked on a romantic relationship, she only acts to defend her lover. In contrast, in the *Merchant*, Portia never acts out of pure selfishness. She never strives to succeed financially. She does not entrap Bassanio for his money—he has none—and she freely gives of her own money when she hears about Antonio's situation. Her actions may look self-interested, since she is in love with Bassanio, but the play emphasizes her desire to support a social system that is represented by Antonio: as Bassanio has told her, Antonio is 'one in whom | The ancient Roman honour more appears | Than any that draws breath in Italy' (3.2.294–6). The allusion to Roman honor, indicating Antonio's civic-mindedness, is as important in this description as his personal friendship. Portia says that 'a friend of this description' must not suffer on account of Bassanio's debts. Although she does bring the situation back to her love for Bassanio, telling him 'Since you are dear bought, I will love you dear,' (3.2.313)—possibly an allusion to the original bond story and its financial / sexual arrangements—her own ethical concerns as illustrated by other scenes in the play mesh with this description of Antonio's Roman honor.

In many ways, Antonio and Portia are interchangeable: both are elite figures who use their money for others, never for themselves, and who have teacherly relationships with the people around them (Antonio with Bassanio; Portia with Nerissa and, to a certain degree, with Bassanio). Portia's positive role in the play is taken up from the other versions of the bond story: all of the

women, even the treacherous widow in the Italian version, intervene in the trial with courage and wisdom. In contrast, merchants, like Shylock and also like Antonio and the lover's foster-father in *Il Pecorone*, Ansaldo, are less clearly aligned with virtue on account of their involvement in trade.

In the *Gesta* version of the bond story, the association between mercantilism and evil is explicit and taken for granted. The unworthy knight and, to a much lesser extent, the emperor's daughter, who takes the knight's money for sex, are represented as sinful. But it is the merchant in particular—who is not Jewish in this version—that the moralization calls 'the devil' for his role in the bargain. In the *Gesta*, the unworthy knight needs cash in order to try to have sex with the emperor's daughter. By the third try, he has exhausted his own resources and must go far away to 'a grete citee, in the which wer many marchauntes, and many philosphers' in order to find the money.²⁰ Once he gets to the city, he finds a merchant who will lend it to him but not at the terms the knight suggests. The knight offers all of his lands if he fails to provide cash payment on the specified day; the merchant wants, instead, 'a charter of' the knight's 'owne blood' and, if the knight cannot meet the monetary terms on time, 'alle the flesh' from the knight's body 'froo the bone.'²¹ The far away land, the contract in blood, and the ghoulish request for the knight's flesh would have left the *Gesta*'s medieval readers with little doubt about the transaction: these were terms that only the devil himself would have offered. Only a very foolish person—or 'lewde' as the philosopher Virgil describes it after the fact to the knight—would have entered into such an arrangement.

In the *Gesta*, the merchant's wickedness is almost an afterthought: it is the unworthy knight's dilemma and subsequent rescue by the emperor's daughter that carries the narrative and holds the reader's interest. In *Il Pecorone*, two merchants are introduced, the foster-father Ansaldo and the Jewish moneylender. Like the *Gesta*, the evil of the moneylender, in this case Jewish, is important but unquestioned by the text: Ansaldo is to be killed, having taken the debt upon himself to help his foster-son Giannetto outfit a ship to woo the widow (unbeknownst to Ansaldo), because the moneylender wants to be known as he who 'killed the greatest of the christian merchants.'²² Ansaldo, in contrast, is generous and seemingly without fault. *Il Pecorone* shows no concern with the

²⁰ *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

²² *Il Pecorone* in the Arden Edition of *Merchant of Venice*, 149.

widow's behavior; it probably comes as no surprise, then, that the Italian story represents Ansaldo as entirely beneficent.

The ambiguity of the *Merchant's* title, its ability to refer to either Shylock or Antonio, is a good indication of the vexed relationship between mercantilism and morality on which the narrative depends. In particular, it seems to look backward toward a 'Roman' (and medieval) ideal of generosity, fidelity, and self-sacrifice, but finds the economic and legal apparatus of the 'new world' in which its characters live and make decisions inescapable. Although traditional associations between mercantilism and corruption make their way into Shakespeare's play, just as they do in other versions of the bond story, the *Merchant* finds its characters' dependence on modern economic systems both troubling and inescapable. For all its celebration of Antonio's generosity, the play understands that he is a merchant and as such concerned with profit; as it downplays Portia and Antonio's concern for their own wealth, it reminds us that they are only able to intervene because they are wealthy. Unlike Jessica, who must steal from her father to be with the man she loves, Portia has the means to save her lover's friend. Although Portia does not need to use her money to do this, ultimately, the play never lets its characters' investments out of sight: we are told, for example, that some of Antonio's ships have made it, that he is not, after all, ruined financially, even after Portia has saved his life by her wits.

The story of the bond might seem to be about hatred and revenge, but as much as that, it is about the performance of good deeds and the difficulty of separating such actions from economics. Allegory becomes a way of pushing that pressure aside, at least for a short time, and by the end of the court scene, Shylock has become as much an abstraction as Portia has. If she is a medieval virtue, he is the *Gesta's* allegorized devil, taking his cues from the drama's raging vice figures and demons. By using the story of the bond in this way, the play reminds its audience that the choices that all the participants in the ordeal have made are serious: Antonio's decision to take on extreme risk; Bassanio's decision, despite his reservations, to allow his friend to endanger his life; Shylock's decision to forego monetary profit for revenge; Portia's decision to try to 'do good' by offering mercy to the enemy. By removing the narrative, temporarily, from the realistic sphere, Mercy (Portia) and the Devil (Shylock) draw attention to the urgency of moral choice, adapting the *Gesta's* story and highlighting the ethical impetus that motivates earlier, English drama.

The Caskets

Like the move toward allegory, incorporation of stylized scenes such as the choosing of the caskets acts as a check on dramatic imitation of real life, and its effect is to emphasize moral or philosophical principles. Although audiences can abstract those principles out of narrative, the morals appear in contexts, and it is the context, rather than the moral, that distinguishes Shakespeare's use of the story of the caskets from the version in the *Gesta*. Despite the obvious principle elucidated by the test—do not choose according to external appearances—the principle as it appears in the *Merchant* requires application within parameters established by narrative.

In employing the story in the *Merchant*, Shakespeare takes the *Gesta*'s account about the vagaries of fortune and the importance of trust in God's providence and turns it into a narrative about trusting one's desires and acting wholeheartedly. In the *Gesta*, providing the right answer to the test is proof of virtue. In this account, the daughter of the King of Naples is examined by the Roman emperor after she is shipwrecked during a voyage to marry the emperor's son, swallowed by a whale, and nearly killed by the knives of men butchering the whale. Although after hearing of her trials the *Gesta*'s emperor 'hadde gret compassion for hir in his herte' and acknowledges that she has 'sufferid moche angre for the love of [his] soone,' he nonetheless administers the test to see if she is 'worthi.'²³

In the *Merchant*, the test, although ostensibly aimed at fulfilling the terms of Portia's father's will, is used, in actuality, to demonstrate the identity of right choice and love. Destiny is not fickle fortune in the play but an intentional force, and, as Nerissa tells Portia, this assures that Portia will love the man who chooses properly. In response to Portia's despair over the terms of the will, Nerissa assures her that, since Portia's father was 'virtuous,' the lottery for her hand will give Portia what she wants: 'who chooses [Portia's father's] meaning chooses you, [and you] will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who shall rightly love' (1.2.30–3). Virtue, then, is assumed and there is no need for the right choice and chooser, Bassanio, to prove his worth.

What is interesting about the scene is not the rightness of the right choice, but, rather, the logical nature of the thinking leading up to the wrong answers. In the *Gesta*, the wrongness of the mistaken choices would be apparent to any

²³ *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 299.

medieval reader. Medieval Christians were well aware that they were 1. undeserving (the first casket says the one who chooses it will find inside what she deserves) and 2. that human nature is corrupt and that choosing according to 'kind' (the second casket says it contains what nature and kind desire) means choosing false things of the world. Further, there is no mistaking the right choice in the *Gesta*: casket three states that the one who chooses it will find what 'god hath disposid.'²⁴ In contrast, in the *Merchant* the right answer, the casket made of lead on which is written 'Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath' (2.7.9), is only an obvious choice if, like Bassanio, the woman you love has talked in similar terms to you, saying things like 'One half of me is yours, the other half yours— | Mine own I would say, but if mine, then yours, | And so all yours' (3.2.16–18). Critics squabble over the song sung just before the choice is made: does it tip Bassanio off by offering rhymes with lead ('bred,' 'head,' and 'nourished')? Is it fair of Portia to do so? But this is in some ways beside the point because Portia and Bassanio have already talked over things enough to have a common understanding of what love is. Even her parting comment before the ordeal, 'Away then! I am lock'd in one of them; | If you do love me, you will find me out' (3.2.40–1), is a reminder or clue: she *is* the casket and choosing her means making an active decision to accept this 'all or nothing' view of love and fortune.

Although it should have been obvious to Bassanio which casket to choose, the wrong choices in the *Merchant* are rationalized, indicating that the play distinguishes between what is logical and what is right. When Morocco selects the gold casket, the one which says it will give the chooser 'what many men desire' (2.7.37), he derives his answer from Portia's excellence: she is of such worth that 'all the world desires her. | From the four corners of the earth they come | To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint' (2.7.38–40). When Arragon picks the silver casket, his arguments for his choice are as convincing as Morocco's had been for the gold casket. Arragon, in contrast with Morocco, devalues the importance of common opinion, the 'many' of the inscription, dismissing the gold chest because he does not wish to be 'rank[ed]... with the barbarous multitude'; instead, he chooses the silver casket, the one that states that the chooser will 'get as much as he deserves' (2.9.36) because, he says, he believes in the importance of merit. Refusing to 'cozen Fortune,' he assumes that he is meritorious, that, on those grounds, the silver casket is the

²⁴ Ibid., 300.

right answer, and that he will win Portia. His reasoning leads him to the wrong answer, as Portia observes, ‘O, these deliberate fools, when they do choose, | They have the wisdom by their wit to lose’ (2.9.80–1), but, like Morocco’s selection, Arragon’s might just as easily have been shown to be the proper one given other circumstances.

The choosing of the right casket in the *Merchant* is, like Portia / Mercy’s intervention in the court scene and Antonio’s boundless generosity towards Bassanio, an act that is motivated by love and not logic. For this reason, although part of the fun of the sequence lies in guessing how the wrong answers will be wrong, the audience is never troubled by the fact that the ostensible lesson of the caskets has little to do with the actual choices made in the play. This disparity is highlighted by the way that the *Merchant* modifies the moral in the *Gesta* by changing the caskets’ contents.

Although Bassanio, following the moral espoused by the *Gesta*, explains his choice by distinguishing between inner worth and outer show—‘So may the outward shows be least themselves— | The world is still deceiv’d with ornament’ (3.2.73–4)—consideration of the casket sequence as a whole points, instead, toward observations about the nature of love and community. In the *Gesta*, the casket contents are human bones (gold casket covered with jewels), precious jewels (silver casket), and precious jewels (lead casket), and the options are arranged to show a progression: from simple mortality, to earthly success that masquerades as genuine happiness, and on to spiritual joy that transcends externals and is given to those who, as Bassanio puts it ‘choose not by the view’ (3.2.131). In the *Merchant*, the moral sequence is re-articulated to emphasize varying degrees of self-love. The caskets contain a death’s head (the golden casket), a portrait of a ‘blinking idiot’ (the silver casket), and Portia’s picture (the lead casket). Here, the progression is from self-esteem based on acceptance of communal mores, to self-love predicated on a sense of superiority, to love for another that requires sacrifice of self.

Bassanio chooses properly, in the world of the play, not because his reasoning is better than that of the other suitors but because he is *meant* to be with Portia. The spectacle of the caskets is designed explicitly to showcase the ways that fortune and love conspire together for characters who, like Portia, try to act virtuously. This might seem to remove this episode from any aspect of moral decision-making to be found in the play, but it does not. Rather, it insists that to make a choice to ‘do good,’ in this case to act ethically in love, requires faith in one’s mission and understanding of the value of one’s desires.

The scene, at least in part, supports a patriarchal system of authority over the individual—Portia's father's will must be respected—but it also offers the possibility of choosing and acting in accordance with one's own wishes. This rule applies to other characters in the play as well: Launcelot and Jessica, for example, are granted the possibility of choosing, and finding, good fortune. Oddly enough, although it looks like the play is transcending 'medieval' ideas about fate, endorsing the rise of the independent individual, it is also espousing the *Gesta's* idea, the one that the emperor's daughter chooses, that insists that God does not dispose evil.

Barlaam and Josaphat (another casket story)

The casket story and its moral about selflessness, as described above, find expression in the *Merchant* in the romantic love between Portia and Bassanio. Yet, as is often the case in Shakespeare's plays, the importance of wedded relationships coexists with an acute sensitivity to the significance of same-sex friendship. Antonio and Bassanio's relationship, as well as Portia and Nerissa's, illustrates the play's commitment to and enjoyment of friendship. Antonio's friendship for Bassanio has been described in a number of ways—as paternal, as potentially erotic, as Christian allegory in which Antonio is the Christ who must sacrifice for believers.²⁵ In thinking about the nature of friendship in the play, another possible source from the *Gesta Romanorum*, the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, offers perspective on the importance of emotional, non-sexual relationships. Although relatively unfamiliar now, the story was enormously popular in the Middle Ages, appearing in the Latin *Gesta* and also in editions of the *Golden Legend*, including Caxton's fifteenth-century English translation. The legend, which appears to be a Christianized account of the Buddha's life, describes the prince Josaphat's conversion by the monk Barlaam.²⁶

²⁵ See for example Steve Patterson, 'The Bankruptcy of Homoerotic Amity in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50 (1999), 9–32. Patterson provides a history of ideas about friendship and love between the two characters in relation to the idea of 'amity.'

²⁶ The story does not appear in the early medieval versions of the *Gesta* or in Robinson's edition. It was, however, very well known throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. See Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol.2 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. 1993), 355–66.

The life begins with a history of Josaphat's father's antipathy toward Christianity. In the version from the *Golden Legend*, a friend of the Indian king Avennir converts to the Christian faith and enters a monastic order. This angers Avennir, and he begins to persecute Christians. Ironically, Avennir's own son becomes a Christian, even though his father had tried to shield him from any contact with that faith. Because the court astrologers predicted that Josaphat would not reign in Avennir's kingdom but would, instead rule 'in an incomparably better one' through his faith as 'a believer in Christ's religion,' Avennir sends him to a faraway palace.²⁷ Despite Avennir's efforts to keep his son away from Christians, the monk Barlaam, in disguise as a merchant with a precious stone, goes to see the prince, and tells him a series of stories that lead to his conversion.

In Barlaam's stories, the ascetic life, in which the inner world of the spirit is preferred over the outer world, is identified as the proper path for the young man to follow. The first encounter between Barlaam and Josaphat follows this model: Barlaam is disguised in rags but Josaphat welcomes him anyway. Barlaam commends him for this: 'Prince, you did well when you paid no attention to my poor appearance.'²⁸ Barlaam's stories, like the *Gesta's* story of the three caskets, draw attention to the importance of inner truth over outer appearances. One of his stories is, in fact, a variation on the story of the caskets. In the version told by Barlaam, there are four caskets, two covered in gold and filled with stinking, rotten bones; two covered with pitch, pleasant-smelling inside, and filled with treasure. The choice must be made by a group of nobles who have criticized a great king for having embraced poor, ill-clothed, and hungry men. The king calls the nobles before him and asks which caskets are the most valuable. The nobles, as expected, choose the gold ones, which the king tells them are 'like the men who are clad in glorious garments but inwardly are full of the uncleanness of vice.' The pitch-covered caskets, he explains, are like impoverished, badly-clothed people who, despite their outer appearance, 'emanate the perfume of all virtues' from within.²⁹

Although Barlaam tells a number of other stories about the foolishness of judging by outer appearance, the legend, like the *Merchant* and its treatment of the caskets, seems to move away from the moral, with its dismissal of this world, toward an ideal of human community and shared life goals. Josaphat, after hearing a series of similar stories, decides to convert. Although the legend

²⁷ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 356.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 359.

suggests that his decision is based on the exemplary stories he has heard, the text emphasizes the importance of companionship above all else. Josaphat wants to go to live with Barlaam in the desert. He is kept from this goal for many years, even serving as ruler of his father's kingdom, but is, finally, reunited with Barlaam. He puts on rags, a disguise needed to escape from his kingdom, and wanders around the desert for two years before finding Barlaam living in a cave. These are, of course, ascetic trappings, but their importance is secondary to Josaphat's relationship with Barlaam. Although 'unable to find Barlaam' for two years, Josaphat perseveres in his quest to find his teacher. Finally, 'at last,' he comes upon the cave in which Barlaam is living. Barlaam, having heard Josaphat's voice, rushes out and they 'embrace[] each other fervently.'³⁰

Modern psychological theories might encourage us to read this story in a number of ways—probably the most obvious and pedestrian would argue for Barlaam as a paternal substitute for Avennir. But the story itself seems to emphasize the importance of both the affective and the moral in cementing the bond between the two: because Barlaam teaches Josaphat about a way of life, and not just an idea, Josaphat wants to live his life with Barlaam. Although the legend's moral lesson might seem to concern the decision to convert or the decision to lead an austere, ascetic life, the hard decision for Josaphat is actually about his feelings for Barlaam. He cannot immediately follow his teacher because of his responsibilities in the world. He longs to live a life of 'marvelous austerity and virtue' in Barlaam's company, but he is unable to do so for many years because when he tried to leave his kingdom 'he was always caught by the people.'³¹ The choice, then, is about competing responsibilities and desires. In the *Golden Legend* version of the story, the desert sanctuary, in which companionship, ideals, and simple existence merge together, stands as an ideal.

In the *Merchant*, Belmont fulfils a similar function: it is a refuge for friends to talk about ideas of virtue and a place in which to live companionably. As Jessica tells Lorenzo during their stay with Portia, Bassanio, in marrying Portia, has found 'the joys of heaven here on earth' (3.5.76). The suggestion is that Portia shares with Bassanio the kind of friendship that Bassanio and Antonio, according to Portia, share: 'in companions | That do converse and waste the time together, | Whose souls do bear an egall yoke of love, | There must be needs a like proportion | Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit' (3.4.11–15). This is the same friendship that Barlaam and Josaphat share, and, despite the

³⁰ Ibid., 366.

³¹ Ibid., 366.

asceticism they practice, it is another path to living life in this world to its fullest extent.

It is often assumed that moral writers in the Middle Ages devalued human relationships, especially friendship, because such relationships distracted believers. In *Everyman*, for example, it is Fellowship to whom Everyman first turns and Fellowship who, in turn, first deserts Everyman. Similarly, in the morality known as the *Digby Play of Mary Magdalene*, Lechery (obviously not a companion with whom one should spend time) acts as a comforter and friend when Mary's father dies and then betrays her.³² The saint's trials arise in part from her weakness for companionship. Negative representations like these coupled with the theme of life's vanity are common in medieval literature, and it is perhaps not surprising that we might see the Middle Ages as an age that valued friendship to a lesser extent than Shakespeare and his contemporaries did. But if we conclude this, we do so at the risk of simplifying the idea of friendship and its moral importance in both periods. What matters, in the English moralities and in the *Merchant*, is the sense of 'like proportion,' as Portia calls it, between friends. If Fellowship and Lechery are dismissed it is because they are *bad* friends: good friends, like Antonio in the *Merchant* and Good Deeds in *Everyman*, share a common purpose and sense of morality with their friends. They come to their friends' aid when they are needed.

Josaphat learns that there is a difference between bad and good friends just before his conversion. Barlaam tells him a story, which appears to be a source for *Everyman*, in which a man is deserted by two of his three friends when he is in great need. After the first friend, who the man loves most of all, abandons him completely and the second friend, for whom he has the second greatest affection—equal to his love of himself—also fails to help him, he turns to the third friend. This third friend, for whom he has felt little love, helps him. The man apologizes to the friend telling him, 'I don't know what to say to you. I have not loved you as I should have, but I'm surrounded by troubles and have lost my friends, and I beg of you to lend me your help and to grant me your pardon.'³³ The third friend readily agrees to help, telling him he holds the man a dear friend who has treated him with kindness, and tells him he will intercede on the man's behalf with the king. The *Golden Legend* allegorizes the story, but it does so within the narrative of friendship described above: good friends may represent 'all the good works that

³² See *Medieval Drama*, ed. Bevington, *Everyman*, 945, lines 197ff; *Mary Magdalene*, 703–6, lines 440ff.

³³ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 360.

can go in ahead of us...[and] can intercede with God for us' but they are also companions whom Josaphat and people like him treat with kindness and seek out for companionship.

Conclusion: Shakespeare's Medieval Morality

In this essay, I have shown how Shakespeare's play differs from its sources in the *Gesta*. The *Merchant*, in its explicit concern with ties between human beings, pushes aside the allegorized morals that medieval preachers found so useful. The play takes medieval narratives about moral choices and uses them to insist on the importance of human relations in such decision-making. Each of the stories borrowed from the *Gesta* is, to varying degrees, about generosity toward other people; we might call this mercy, following the play's theme, or refer to it more broadly as social responsibility. Shylock's punishment in the play—the loss of his daughter, his money, and his religion—is important to the *Merchant*, if distasteful to modern audiences, because it is a reminder that he has not, as Portia has, worked to help others. When he claims not to dread judgment because he has done 'no wrong' (4.1.89) and compares his situation to slave-holders who defend ill-use of slaves because '“The slaves are ours”' (4.1.98), Shylock demonstrates the problem with ideas of law and ownership that ignore the human dimension in society: without mercy, which entails recognition of value in excess of market value or justice, any kind of inequality is defensible. A comparison with the medieval sources shows just how much the play uses this idea to describe conditions in the world, that is, to present a medieval morality that is applicable to secular life. Shylock may be a 'devil,' since he is a merchant, in Shakespeare's play, but then so, too, is Antonio: what the play does is take the medieval source's transcendent morals and insist on finding ways to apply them to life in this world.

It may sound as if I am proposing that the divide between the medieval and early modern is almost insurmountable, but that is only true if we continue to assume that medieval readers looked at stories like those in the *Gesta* solely for their allegorical explanations of the sinner's relationship to God. What the *Merchant* does for medieval literary traditions is remind critics that the stories can be read in other ways. It is just as likely that medieval readers, like

Shakespeare's audiences, were interested in the *Gesta* because it gave them ways to think about moral decision-making as it affected their lives in this world. Perhaps what Shakespeare saw in the material, an opportunity to think about moral choices and their importance in the secular world, was, in fact, what medieval audiences also appreciated about the stories. Perhaps it is our sense of the Middle Ages and its use of allegory for transcendent purposes that we need to reconsider in light of the lessons that Shakespeare's play can teach us.

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